



# Northeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee



## YEAR IN REVIEW DECEMBER 2023

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## Overview

The [Charter](#) for the Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee was approved by NEAFWA on April 5, 2022.

The mission of the Committee stated in that charter is: *Provide leadership and direction from the NEAFWA Directors and leadership within the Northeast Region of the FWS on efforts related to large-scale landscape conservation needs and opportunities, including the development and coordination of shared priorities and interjurisdictional efforts.*

That charter established the initial Steering Committee membership and the structure of a working group.

In November 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began supporting a fulltime Landscape Conservation Coordinator position and selected the first coordinator. NEAFWA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service selected members for the working group.

This document summarizes our efforts to identify and advance large-scale landscape conservation opportunities since then.

## Prioritizing Northeast Landscapes and Themes

From November 2022 through January 2023, the working group and coordinator reached out to a broad range of Service programs, NEAFWA Associations, Committees and staff and compiled information on landscape partners, partnerships, teams, funded projects, potential projects, plans, focus areas, and funding sources. Using this data, they developed an initial set of 21 priority landscapes and themes focused on habitat types and associated species as well as specific watersheds in the region.

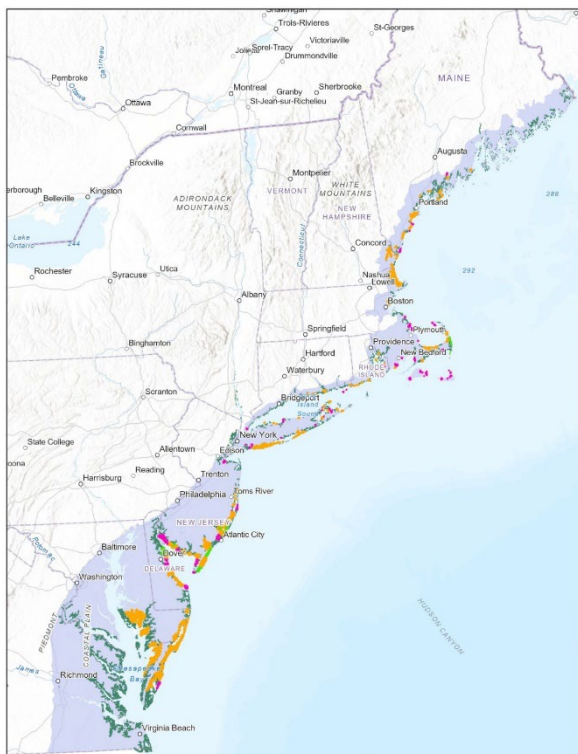
The working group reviewed, discussed, organized, and prioritized this information and agreed on the following subset of seven landscape priorities and themes:

- Atlantic Coast: Coastal Resiliency and Coastal Habitat Restoration
- Northeast Region River, Stream, and Watershed Restoration (Source to the Sea)
- Appalachian and Northern Forests
- Pine Barrens, Grasslands and other Xeric Habitats and Dependent Species
- Appalachian Corridor Highlands and Streams
- Support and Coordination for Watershed and Other Delivery Partnerships
- Northeast One Health Initiative: Wildlife Disease Monitoring, Response, Management

The Steering Committee met jointly with the working group in January 2023 and reached consensus on these top two priorities:

- Atlantic Coast: Coastal Resiliency and Coastal Habitat Restoration
- Appalachian Corridor Highlands and Streams

**Atlantic Coast**



**Appalachian Corridor**



The Steering Committee agreed that these two landscapes would be both the initial focus for NEAFWA and the top two priorities to be submitted to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Joint Task Force on Landscape Conservation for consideration by the Department of the Interior as regional priorities for the America the Beautiful Challenge Grant program (and potentially other federal funding). These two NEAFWA priorities were submitted to the AFWA Joint Task Force on Landscape Conservation on January 31.

## America the Beautiful Challenge Grant Proposals



Significant input on potential suite of projects was provided by NEAFWA Directors, Associations and Committees, Service programs, at-risk species teams, relevant regional partnerships and staff. The coordinator and working group then collaborated with Northeast states and partners to develop two multistate landscape scale preproposals for the America the Beautiful Challenge grant program for the two priority landscapes:

1. *Atlantic Coast: Coastal Resiliency and Coastal Habitat Restoration*
2. *Appalachian Corridor Highlands and Streams*

These two multistate pre-proposals were submitted to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) by working group members, state partners and collaborators with assistance from the coordinator by the deadline of April 20, 2023:

- A pre-proposal suite for the Atlantic Coast was submitted by New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection requesting a total of \$6.6 million for a suite of ten salt marsh restoration projects in those three states benefiting saltmarsh sparrow, diamondback terrapin, black rail and other priority species.
- A pre-proposal suite for the Appalachians was submitted by West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, and Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife requesting a total of \$8.1 million for a planning project in the Appalachian Coalfields region (in West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio), and two multi-watershed restoration projects in Virginia and Massachusetts benefitting a diversity of listed, at-risk and endemic species.

These two pre-proposals were approved by NFWF in June. Full proposals were then developed and submitted by NEAFWA partners with assistance from the coordinator in late July.

NFWF announced funded proposals in November for two suites of projects listed below in each of the two priority landscapes.



NEAFWA partners developed *America the Beautiful Challenge* grant program pre-proposals for the two priority landscapes, Atlantic Coast and Appalachian Corridor. **Photos:** USFWS

Atlantic Coast projects: (described above)

- New Hampshire: *Restoring New Hampshire Salt Marshes*
- Rhode Island: *Conserving the Hydrology and Climate Resilience of Five Priority Salt Marshes in Rhode Island*

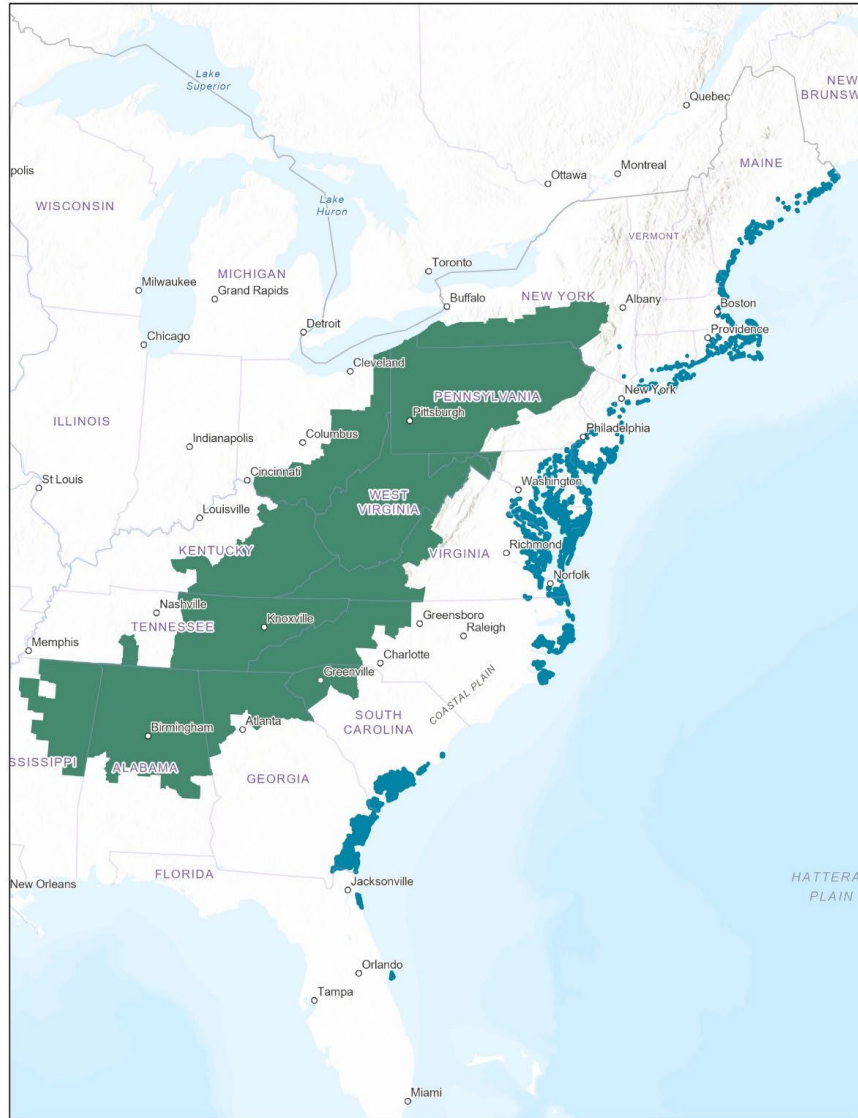
Appalachian projects: (described above)

- Virginia: *Aquatic Connectivity and Enhancing Mussel Restoration Capacity in the Upper Tennessee River*
- Massachusetts: *Aquatic Connectivity for Imperiled Species in the Appalachian Corridor of Massachusetts*

Other NEAFWA and related agency projects that received funding include:

- Pennsylvania: *Re-Establishing Aquatic Connectivity on State Game Lands*
- Washington, D.C.: *Regenerative Urban Watershed and Wetland Restoration on Fort Dupont Creek*
- Vermont: *The Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative*

## DOI Keystone Initiatives in the Northeast and Southeast



### Informing Keystone Initiatives and Funding

The [Department of the Interior announced a Restoration and Resilience Framework](#) to support coordination across agency restoration and resilience programs and drive transformational outcomes with strategic investments that improve degraded lands and waters and advance climate resilience.

The Restoration and Resilience Framework has specific goals. Nested within them are an initial set of *Keystone Initiatives*, each focused on turning the tide on a conservation challenge. Two of the Keystone Initiatives are within the NEAFWA region and align with the priority landscapes selected by the Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee.

NEAFWA and Fish and Wildlife Service staff provided information on these priority landscapes to inform potential Keystone Initiative projects.

*Keystone Initiative Coasts: Saltmarsh:*

- This initiative aligns with the *Atlantic Coast: Coastal Resiliency and Coastal Habitat Restoration NEAFWA Priority Landscape*.
- The coordinator worked directly with Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and indirectly with states to identify six dredge spoil design, six elevation enhancement implementation, and six other implementation projects in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Delaware.
- Three of these projects in the Northeast Region have been recommended for funding with final decisions due later in December.



An adult saltmarsh sparrow perches at Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine.

**Photo:** Bri Benvenuti/USFWS

*Keystone Initiative: Appalachia:*

- This initiative aligns with *the Appalachian Corridor: Highlands and Streams NEAFWA Landscape*.
- The coordinator serves as co-chair of the Appalachia Keystone Initiative.
- The coordinator worked with Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy, Service programs, and state partners to identify potential projects including:

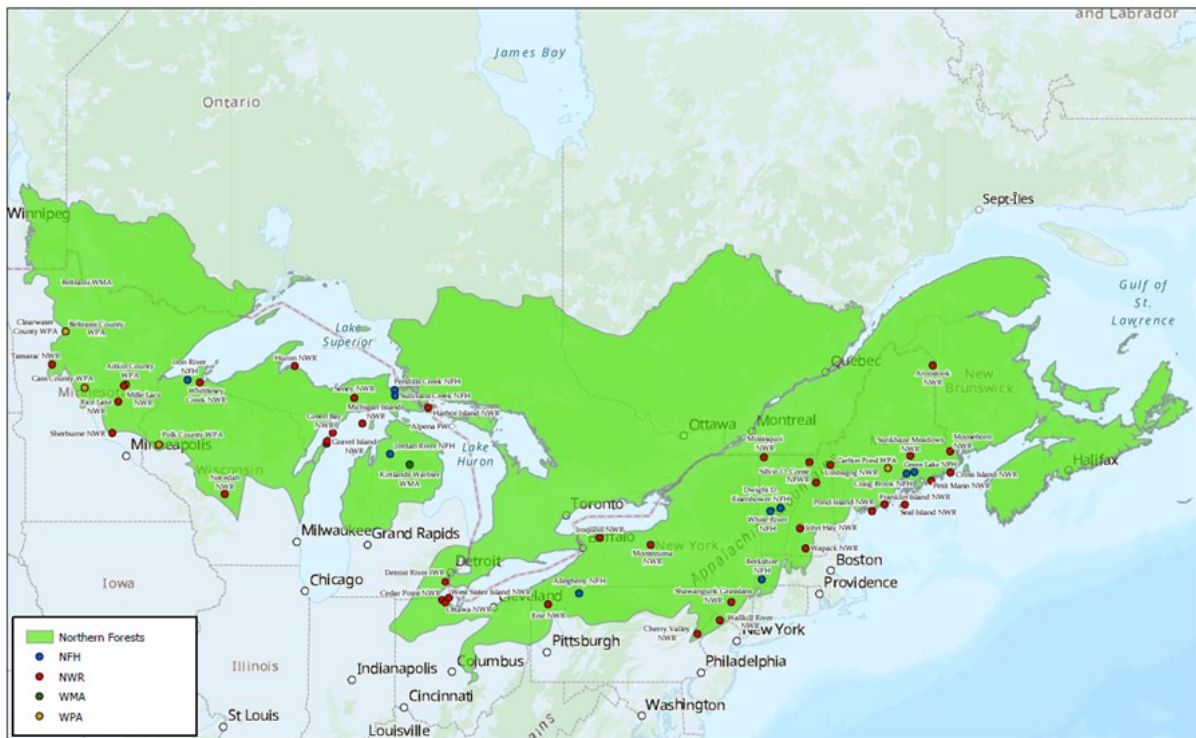
- Mined Land Reforestation/Restoration on Cumberland Plateau/Pine Mountain with The Nature Conservancy (Kentucky and Virginia)
- Multiple mined land restoration sites on Pennsylvania Game Lands in Northwestern Pennsylvania with Pennsylvania Game Commission (Pennsylvania)
- Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) forest and hydrology restoration and invasive spp. management (West Virginia)
- Cherry Valley NWR riparian restoration, resilient recreation, invasive spp. management (Pennsylvania)
- Erie NWR (French Creek watershed) aquatic connectivity and watershed restoration (Pennsylvania)

Three of these NWR projects in the Northeast Region have been recommended for funding with final decisions due later in December.

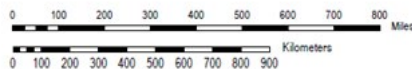
## Northern Forest Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Planning and Implementation

The coordinator worked with National Wildlife Refuges and Science Applications in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Northeast and Midwest Regions on *A Landscape Conservation Approach for a Climate Resilient Northern Forest* that includes \$25 million in federal IRA funding.

**The Northern Forest region**



Produced in FWS Region 3 NWRs  
Bloomington, MN  
Produced: 10 February 2023



The Northern Forest in the Northeast Region includes the following states: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

- *Landscape Conservation Design and Collaborative*: This project will develop a regional, cross-jurisdictional collaborative partnership to plan and deliver a landscape conservation design for select areas in the northern forests.
  - The Midwest and Northeast Region will convene a summit of state and federal agencies to collaborate on conservation planning.
- *Resilient Infrastructure in the Northern Forest Refuges and State Lands*: This project will strengthen the capacity of habitats and infrastructure in the National Wildlife Refuge System in coordination with multi-state Wildlife Management Areas to withstand the long-term impacts of climate change. Extreme weather and storms of increasing magnitude pose a risk to undersized and obsolete road-stream crossing that alter hydrology and restrict aquatic organism passage on hundreds of miles of tributaries.
  - The coordinator is working through the NEAFWA Landscape Committee to engage state fish and wildlife agency contacts in the seven Northeast Region Northern Forest States and with the Midwest Region on a process to identify and select state conservation area projects for funding.
  - Service's refuge staff identified National Wildlife Refuge and nearby state wildlife management areas (WMAs) potential restoration opportunities in all Northern Forest states in the Northeast Region — Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania and have identified or will shortly identify state contacts associated with those WMAs.

## Networking and Informing other Federal Funding Programs

The coordinator worked with Service programs, states, partners, and partnerships including joint ventures exploring and supporting opportunities for multi-state landscape-scale projects in Northeast Region through other federal agencies. He facilitated meetings and discussions with these federal funding partners and programs:

- NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge
- NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience
- USDA (NRCS-USFS) Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership
- NRCS landscape conservation coordination Capacity Request by USFWS (submitted)

A focus for the coming year will be to build on these relationships with federal funding partners to identify suitable projects and proactively develop multistate landscape scale projects with states, partners, and partnerships. Opportunities to explore leveraging these federal funds with private funds will be explored.



## Enhancing Communications through Website Development and Updates

Background Information on the Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee was made available on a new public [Landscape Conservation section of the NEAFWA Website](#). An outline and details for a standalone website were developed based on the [Midwest Landscape Initiative](#) website. The coordinator and working group members are evaluating options and working with the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee to explore opportunities to align and connect a Landscape Committee website with the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity website and database <https://northeastwildlifediversity.org/>.

Email updates were sent out regularly to NEAFWA Directors, Associations, Committees and Service Programs. The coordinator is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Communications on future regular formatted email updates using *Adobe Campaign* once it becomes available in early 2024.

## Supporting Connecticut River Watershed Partnership

The Connecticut River Watershed Protection Act has been introduced in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. As directed by Congress in the 2022 omnibus bill, the Service is working with federal, state, and NGO partners, including the Friends of Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and representatives from state wildlife agencies to assess the feasibility of a non-regulatory program for habitat conservation and restoration in the watershed.

In a series of virtual meetings with partners from throughout the watershed this year and an in-person meeting in Amherst, this partnership is identifying the priorities that a non-regulatory habitat conservation and restoration program would focus on and envision what an inclusive, watershed-wide strategy and framework would look like, should legislation be enacted. The NEAFWA Landscape Committee is represented by the coordinator and a member of the working group in these discussions.

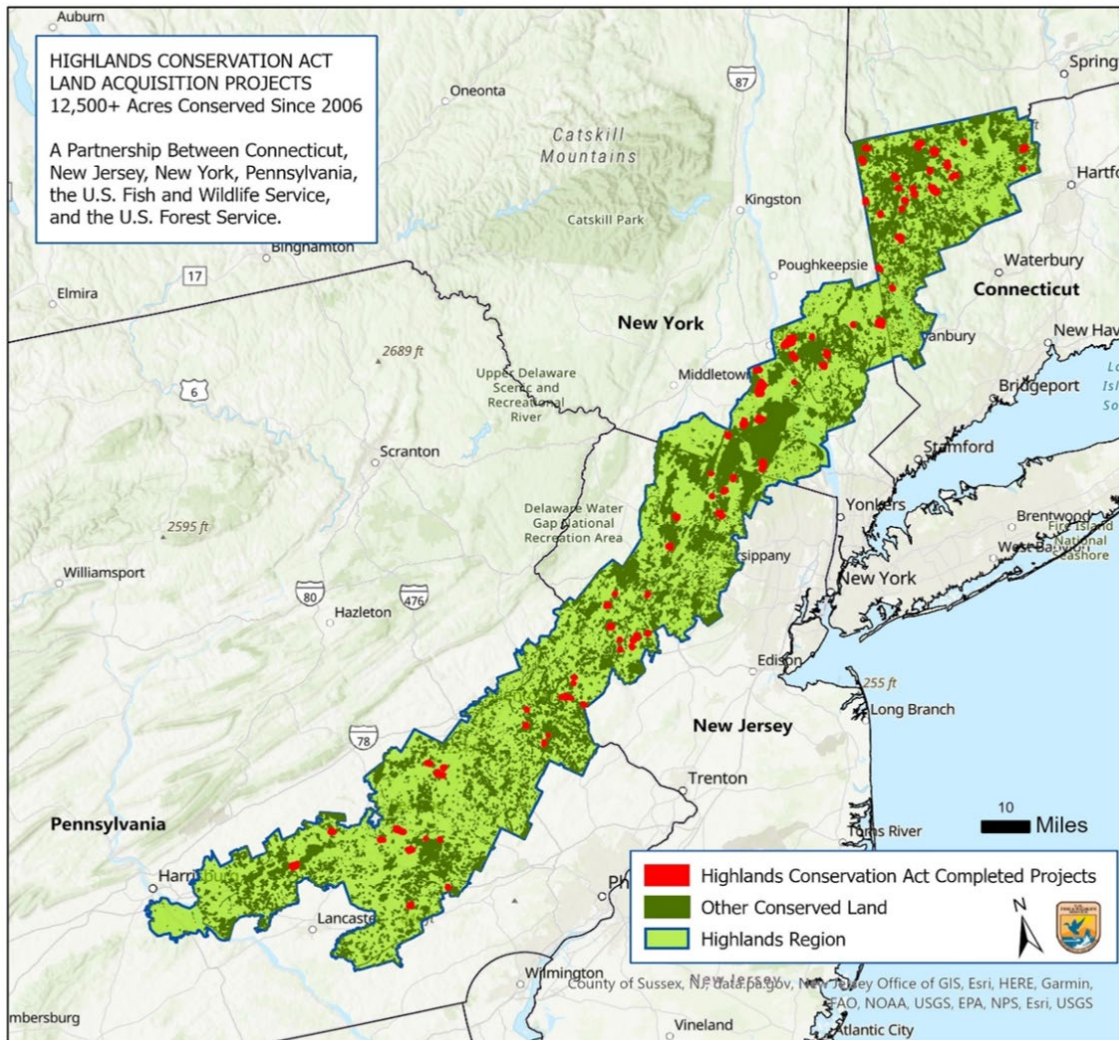
### ***The Connecticut River watershed***



## Highlands Conservation Act Grants Program

The Highlands Steering Committee, represented by state agencies, the Service, U.S. Forest Service, and NGO partners met for the first time in May to set strategic direction for landscape conservation in the Highlands region. Assistant Commissioner David Golden, New Jersey DEP Fish and Wildlife, is representing the NEAFWA Landscape Wildlife Conservation Steering Committee on the Highlands Steering Committee.

### ***The Highlands Conservation Act focal area, with completed projects indicated in red***



## Conservation Planning and Design

There is interest by partners and partnerships working in the eastern United States in having consistent or comparable conservation planning and design. The coordinator is helping to facilitate conversations with the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy and Midwest Landscape Initiative on “Feathering the Edges” - integrating Northeast, Southeast and Midwest Conservation Designs to facilitate large scale conservation planning, prioritization, and implementation.

Technical staff from the Service's Science Applications Program from the Northeast, Southeast and Midwest are meeting to discuss options to use existing conservation designs across these regions in the short term. They will continue to meet, review and outline options for long-term steps.

The coordinator and Service staff worked with NEAFWA 2024 Conference host agency staff in Massachusetts to scope out and then submit a proposal for a symposium on [Conservation Planning and Design: Supporting Landscape-Scale Conservation in the Face of Climate Change in the Northeast Region](#). The proposal was accepted, and the Coordinator, Service staff and state partners are identifying and inviting speakers to inform, discuss and build understanding and consensus on key next steps for integrated conservation planning and design at multiple spatial scales in the Northeast Region.

## Briefings, Strategic Planning and Next Steps

Steering Committee members and the coordinator briefed the National AFWA Joint Task Force on March 20 at the *North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference*.

Steering Committee and working group members and the coordinator met with the NEAFWA Directors, Wildlife Administrators, and Fisheries Administrators, and presented in symposia (*Regional Landscape Partnerships that Benefit Wildlife*) and poster sessions (poster inserted at end of this document) at the *Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference* April 30-May 2, 2023.

Building on the initial priorities and next steps agreed upon by the Steering Committee, the coordinator and working group developed a Strategic Outline of Next Steps that includes categories and subcategories of work; specific tasks within these categories; and committee(s), program(s) and staff responsible; and timelines for each task.

The draft was provided to the Northeast Fisheries and Wildlife Administrators (NEFAA/NEWAA), the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Committee (NEFWDC) and the Habitat, Upland Gamebird, and Rivers and Streams Committees for their review. The coordinator met in September in person with NEFAA/NEWAA and NEFWDC and virtually with Habitat/Upland Gamebird Committee.

Based on the input the [Strategic Outline of Next Steps](#) was revised and provided to the Steering Committee in October and then to the NEAFWA Directors on November 2, 2023.

The Steering Committee agreed with the outline and initial focus areas for the coming year including:

- **Address Barriers:** Identify and address barriers for state agencies in applying for and administering federal funding and participating in landscape scale projects.
- **Increase Communications:** Increasing communication and outreach through a website, regular formatted email newsletters and other approaches.
- **Engage Additional Partners:** Consider a partnership committee to bring other partners to the table for their input at a technical level; and consider including others on the Steering Committee
- **Align Conservation Efforts at Multiple Scales:** Address the relationship and align priorities between the NEAFWA regional landscape work with watershed and other delivery partnerships and funding in region.
- **Increase Project Funding:** Continue to seek funding through the America the Beautiful Challenge and DOI Keystone Initiatives while working proactively with the most relevant other federal funding programs and other potential sources of funding.
- **Agree on Conservation Design Approach:** Assess regional conservation design needs and alternatives including integration between designs in the Northeast, Southeast and Midwest.

**Coordinator Transition:** Andrew Milliken will be retiring at the end of the year. Christina Ryder, currently the Delaware River Watershed Program Manager in the Science Applications program will be interim coordinator from mid-January through to the NEAFWA Conference in April 2024.

**Winter Meetings:** The NEAFWA Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee Working Group and Steering Committee will meet jointly at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office in Hadley, Massachusetts on February 20-22, 2024, to review and agree on detailed next steps for the partnership.

## Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee members

### Steering Committee

Paul Johansen, Chair (WV)  
Kyla Hastie, Co-chair (FWS)  
Wendi Weber Co-chair (FWS)  
Mark Tisa, NEAFWA Pres. (MA)  
Becky Gwynn (VA)  
Bryan Burhans (PA)  
Dave Golden (NJ)  
Steve Kuennen (USFS)  
Gordon Batcheler (NEAFWA Exec. Sec.)

### Working Group

Jenny Dickson (CT) – NEWAA  
Todd Richards (MA) – NEFAA  
Eve Schluter (MA) – NEFWDTC (Terrestrial)  
Mark Ferguson (VT) --NEFWDTC (Aquatic)  
Mike Slattery - FWS Science Apps.  
Colleen Sculley/Dee Blanton- FWS WSFR  
Scot Williamson – WMI  
  
Andrew Milliken (FWS) -- Coord. 2022-23  
Christina Ryder (FWS) --Coord. 2024



# Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee

## Building on a Strong Foundation for Future Landscape Conservation



Andrew Milliken

Northeast Landscape Conservation Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### Background

- The Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee was established by a charter approved by NEAFA Directors in March 2022
- The USFWS provided a coordinator November 2022 and a Steering Committee & Working Group were appointed at that time
- This committee provides strong links to existing NEAFA Associations, Committees, Agencies and staff and USFWS Programs, Teams, landscape and species partnerships

### Charter

Provide leadership and direction from the NEAFA Directors and leadership within the Northeast Region of the FWS on efforts related to large-scale landscape conservation needs and opportunities, including the development and coordination of shared priorities and interjurisdictional efforts.

### Initial Focus

- Inventory and Organize** ongoing, regional landscape-level conservation projects and partnerships
- Identify** landscape-level, multistate conservation needs, opportunities and projects
- Prioritize** landscapes and projects
- Coordinate** partners and projects in priority landscapes
- Seek** funding opportunities and submit coordinated priority projects for funding



### NEAFA Priority Landscapes

#### Appalachian Corridor Highlands and Streams



### Conserving RSGCN, At Risk and other Priority Species through Coordinated Landscape Conservation

NEAFA and FWS partners work closely together to monitor, develop and implement conservation plans for Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need (RSGCN), At Risk, listed, and other priority fish, wildlife and plant species.



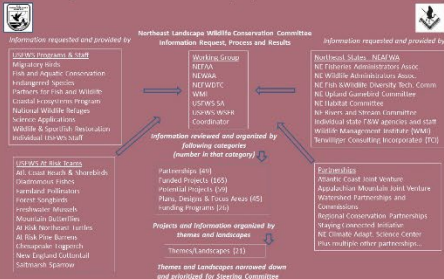
Coordinated strategic planning and implementation of habitat restoration and conservation at landscape scales informed by these species' needs helps ensure that resulting connected networks of lands and waters are conserving these species in the face of change.



Saltmarsh Sparrow, Ray Hennessy/rayhennessy.com

### Building on the Foundation

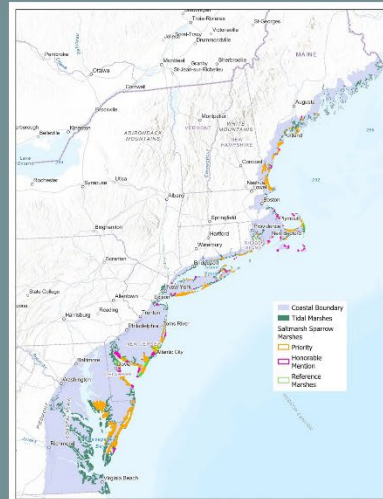
Information flow from NEAFA and USFWS partner networks informing the NEAFA landscape priorities



### Priority Themes and Landscapes

- Atlantic Coast: Coastal Resiliency and Coastal Habitat Restoration**
- River, Stream and Watershed Restoration (Source to the Sea)**
  - A) Aquatic Connectivity, B) Riparian & Floodplain Restoration, C) Conservation of Freshwater Mussels
- Appalachian and Northern Forests**
  - A) Young Forest/Early successional, B) Mature forest, C) Restoring Connectivity
- Pine Barrens, Grasslands and other Xeric Habitats and Dependent Species**
- Appalachian Corridor (Highlands and Streams)**
- Support and Coordination for Watershed and Other Delivery Partnerships**
  - Delaware River Watershed, Chesapeake Bay, Highlands, NY-NJ Rivers Watershed, Conn. River Watershed, Gulf of Maine, Great Lakes
- Northeast One Health Initiative: Wildlife Disease Monitoring, Response, Management**

### Atlantic Coast: Coastal Resiliency and Coastal Habitat Restoration



### Next Steps

- Address broader set of identified priority landscapes
- Coordinate with watershed partnerships
- Share priorities and incorporate other partners, partnerships and funding programs
- Identify priority conservation planning and design needs building on existing tools
- Continue to learn from and collaborate with MLI, SECAS and WAFWA regional landscape partnerships
- Develop communications plan and products



### NEAFA Landscape Committee Members

#### Steering Committee

Paul Johansen, Chair (WV)  
Kyla Hastie, Co-chair (FWS)  
Mark Tisa, NEAFA Pres. (MA)  
Becky Gwynn (VA)  
Bryan Burhans (PA)  
Dave Golden (NJ)

#### Working Group

Jenny Dickson (CT) - NEAFA  
Todd Richards (MA) - NEFAA  
Eve Schluter (MA) - NEFWDC  
Mark Ferguson (VT), NEFWDC  
Mike Slattery - FWS Science Apps.  
Colleen Sculley FWS WSFR  
Dee Blanton- FWS WSFR  
Scot Williamson - WMI

Coordinator - Andrew Milliken (FWS/NEAFA)  
Executive Secretary - Gordon Batcheller (NEAFA)

Poster on initial steps of the NEAFA Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee presented at the NEAFA Conference in March 2023.