



Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA)
Northeast Landscape Wildlife Conservation Committee
Executive Summary of Progress to Date and Next Steps
April 5, 2022 – May 2, 2023

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.

From November 2022 through January 2023, the Working Group and Coordinator reviewed, compiled, and organized information on landscape partnerships, funded projects, potential projects, plans, focus areas, and funding sources resulting in an initial set of 21 priority landscapes focused on habitat types and associated species as well as specific watersheds in the region. The Working Group reviewed, discussed, organized, grouped, 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 and reached consensus on the following top two priorities:

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

The Steering Committee agreed that these two landscapes would be both the initial focus for NEAFWA and be the top two priorities to be submitted to the 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.

The Coordinator and Working Group worked with Northeast states and partners to develop two multistate landscape scale preproposals for the America the Beautiful Challenge Grant program. These were designed to address the two NEAFWA priorities noted above (i.e., *Atlantic Coast: Coastal Resiliency and Coastal Habitat Restoration* and *Appalachian Corridor Highlands and Streams*). A request for input on priority projects to be included in landscape-scale preproposals was sent to all NEAFWA Directors, Fish and Wildlife Chiefs and Committees on March 3, 2023.

Two multistate preproposals were prepared and submitted by the deadline of April 20, 2023:

- A preproposal 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 dollars for ten salt marsh restoration projects in those three states benefiting Salt Marsh Sparrow, diamondback terrapin, Black Rail and other priority species.
- A preproposal 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 \$8.1M for a planning project in the Appalachian Coalfields region (in WV, VA, TN, KY, OH), and two multi-watershed restoration projects in Virginia and Massachusetts benefitting an extremely high diversity of listed, at risk and endemic species.

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

Steering Committee and Working Group members and Coordinator will meet with the NEAFWA Directors, Wildlife Administrators, and Fisheries Administrators, and present in symposia and poster sessions at the *Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference* on April 30-May 2, 2023.

The Steering Committee agreed on a series of next steps for the partnership including the following:

- Exploring opportunities in the broader set of identified priority landscapes;
- Coordinating with funded and proposed watershed partnerships (e.g., Delaware River Watershed, Chesapeake Bay Watershed, Highlands Region, New York – New Jersey Rivers Watershed, Connecticut River Watershed, Gulf of Maine, Eastern Great Lakes, and Lake Champlain);
- Sharing priorities and incorporating other partners, partnerships, and funding opportunities, directly and potentially through a new landscape technical committee;
- Identifying priority conservation planning and design needs building on existing tools;
- Learning from and collaborating with the Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) and Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS); and
- Developing a communications plan and products to reach range a of stakeholders.