



Habitat/Wetlands Initiative¹ Progress Report – October 2007

Introduction

The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration's December 2005 Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes outlined the problems associated with habitat loss and degradation and provided recommendations for protecting and restoring Great Lakes habitat. To address the key habitat and wetland issues in the December 2005 Strategy, the Collaboration launched a Wetlands Initiative with the following near-term goals:

- A wetlands challenge to federal and non-federal partners to protect and restore 200,000 acres of wetlands in the Great Lakes basin; and
- Improving coordination of federal wetlands management programs.

At the same time, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) initiated a 2 year, \$1million project to develop a Great Lakes Habitat Initiative that builds upon the recommendations of the Collaboration's Strategy. The initiative will help partners advance habitat and wetland restoration projects by connecting partners with the information and resources they need to make projects happen. This effort includes developing a database and detailed inventory of potential habitat and wetlands restoration projects.

Moving toward implementation, the two initiatives share similar goals and have been merged into one overarching Habitat/Wetlands Initiative. The initial focus of the newly merged initiative is to coordinate efforts to accomplish the wetlands challenge to federal and non-federal partners to protect and restore 200,000 acres in the Great Lakes basin.

Activities

1. Provide a stakeholder forum for partners to communicate, leverage resources and identify shared opportunities for partnering.

The initiative will provide an ongoing forum that brings together federal agencies, states, tribes, local governments and other Great Lakes stakeholders to identify on-the-ground restoration projects that contribute to landscape-scale habitat needs identified in the 2005 Strategy. The initiative will also identify ways to implement such restoration projects by sharing necessary information, priorities and lessons learned, as well as exploring ways to facilitate development of partnerships and to identify and overcome hurdles to project implementation. Meetings and conference calls will be held on a regular basis to facilitate communication and coordination. In addition, an efficient, simple, and functional approach to coordinating across federal and non-federal stakeholders will be developed in coordination with stakeholders.

Progress to Date

- A Steering Committee, Project Delivery Team and Federal Wetlands Subcommittee were established and have been meeting regularly to share information and provide regional coordination.

¹ The Habitat/Wetlands Initiative was endorsed by the GLRC Executive Committee on March 2, 2007

2. Provide partners with the necessary information to facilitate collaborative restoration work.

The initiative will connect partners with information about potential projects, programs and funding sources for working together to protect and restore wetlands.

Progress to Date

- The Corps has worked with the partners to create a Funding Programs Inventory that contains information on more than 150 funding governmental and nongovernmental programs for habitat restoration work.
- The initiative has also developed a Restoration Projects Database that contains over 200 potential, site-specific habitat projects entered by federal and non-federal partners, and will be updated periodically.

3. Monitor Great Lakes wetland restoration progress.

Progress will be measured and assessed against the 200,000 acre goal using the same definitions and methodology as the President's annual Earth Day Wetlands Report. Great Lakes restoration progress will be reported beginning in December 2007.

Progress to Date

- Since December 2005, an estimated 65,000 acres of wetlands have been protected, improved or restored by federal agencies working with partners. Significant additional acreage has been protected and restored by states, local and tribal governments, and other partners.
- Options will be identified and evaluated to develop a tool to monitor progress towards the overall 200,000 acre wetland restoration goal.

4. Develop a User Manual

In addition to the three activities initially approved, a user manual is being developed to guide partners in how to use the database and tools to restore and protect habitat in the Great Lakes.