



Louisiana Wetland News

Summer 2000

Critical Habitat Proposed for the Piping Plover

The Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is a small shorebird about 6 inches long with sand-colored plumage on its back and crown with white underparts. The bird breeds in the Great Lakes region and winters along South Atlantic, Gulf Coast and Caribbean beaches and barrier islands, primarily along intertidal areas with sparsely vegetated beaches or mud flats. The species was federally listed as threatened and endangered in 1986, and recent surveys indicate that populations declined further as breeding and wintering habitat has been lost to development and recreational uses.



The Piping Plover has been listed as a threatened & endangered species since 1986. The USFWS is now taking action to delineate and protect the bird's habitat.

In response to a lawsuit by Defenders of Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been directed to designate "Critical Habitat" for breeding and wintering populations of Piping Plover by April 30, 2001. Critical Habitat is a specific geographic area essential for the conservation of a threatened and endangered species that may require special management and protection. The USFWS is conducting a series of meetings to obtain public input on proposed establishment of critical habitat for 1,672 miles of coastline along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from North Carolina to Texas.

On July 27, the USFWS conducted such a meeting in Baton Rouge and outlined seven proposed critical habitat units for the Piping Plover in Louisiana. The critical habitat units identified are:

- (LA-1) TX-LA border to eastern Vermilion parish line,
- (LA-2) Wax Lake and Lower Atchafalaya River Deltas,
- (LA-3) Point Au Fer Island,
- (LA-4) Isle Derniers,
- (LA-5) Timbalier Islands to Grand Terre Islands,
- (LA-6) Mississippi River Delta in Plaquemine parish, and
- (LA-7) Breton Islands and Chandeleur Island Chain.

A critical habitat designation does not set up a preserve or refuge and applies only to situations where federal funding or a federal permit is involved. For example, designation of critical habitat does not affect a landowner undertaking a project on private lands as long as federal funding or federal permits are not involved. But because of this bird's potential use of agricultural fields, there was some initial concern as to what impacts this could have on federal programs involving farmers. Although the proposed units outlined at the July 27 meeting are well below the state's zone of agricultural production, there may still be implications for coastal landowners and developers. For example, activities listed by the USFWS that could have an adverse effect on Piping Plover habitat are quite extensive, including...

dredging and spoil placement; seismic exploration; construction and installation of facilities, pipelines and roads associated with oil and gas development; oil spills and oil spill cleanup; construction of dwellings, roads, marinas and other structures and associated impacts such as beach nourishment, stabilization and cleaning; certain types and levels of recreational activities such as all-terrain vehicular activity; storm-water and waste-water discharge from communities; sale, exchange or lease of federal land that contains suitable habitat that is likely to result in the habitat being dredged; marsh restoration; and military maneuvers.

But according to Sam D. Hamilton, Southeast Regional director of the USFWS, "we do not expect additional regulatory requirements from this designation in the wintering habitat of the Southeast. The Piping Plover is protected, and we already consider the impact of federal actions on this species and its habitat." Additional information on this subject can be obtained at the USFWS web site: www.fws.gov/pipingplover or by phoning the Division of Endangered Species (612) 713-5350.



A "Portrait" of Barataria-Terrebonne

As the world's third largest drainage basin, the Mississippi River drains approximately 40% of the contiguous United States, funneling millions of tons of sediments and nutrients annually through southeastern Louisiana. At the foot of this basin lies the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuarine System, a wedge of land between the Mississippi and the Atchafalaya rivers comprising 4.2 million acres of forests, swamps, marshes, islands, bays and bayous. The many attributes of this fertile region are highlighted in a recent publication titled "Portrait of an Estuary: Functions and Values of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary System."



"Portrait of an Estuary" features information on various economic sectors contributing to the economy of Barataria-Terrebonne, including \$324 million in annual expenditures from over 350,000 recreational anglers.

Produced by the LSU AgCenter and the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary program, the 20-page, full-color booklet chronicles the functional aspects of this estuarine landscape and documents the economic contributions of various industrial sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism and petroleum. Beyond environmental and economic data, this portrait weaves a social thread, with references ranging from ancient tribal life to the estuary's diverse cultural mix of today. Punctuating these themes is a stark description of the unparalleled rates of wetland loss and wetland deterioration in the estuary.

The report concludes by highlighting recent wetland restoration efforts and by calling for a renewed commitment to preserve the legacy of this unique landscape for future generations. Free copies of the publication are available from Rex Caffey at the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center (225) 578-2266 (rcaffey@agctr.lsu.edu) or Deborah Schultz at the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (800) 259-0869 (deborah_s@deq.state.la.us).



Wetland Planting Guides Now Available

In recent years the demand for native plant materials in Louisiana has expanded in response to an increasing public and private investment in wetland conservation, restoration and mitigation. Vegetative planting has been shown to be an effective method to retard conversion of marsh to open water, reduce shore-line erosion and promote the re-establishment of native vegetation. However, project designers and implementers often lack adequate training for successful planting, and tangible instructions on plant selection and installation are limited.

In an effort to provide more relevant information on coastal re-vegetation, a series of planting guides is being developed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the LSU AgCenter. Mr. Mike Materne, NRCS Plant Materials specialist, is developing the guides, which feature plant species frequently used in wetland restoration. The guides follow a concise, brochure format, providing information on relevant biology, habitat, sources, forms and methods for use and management.



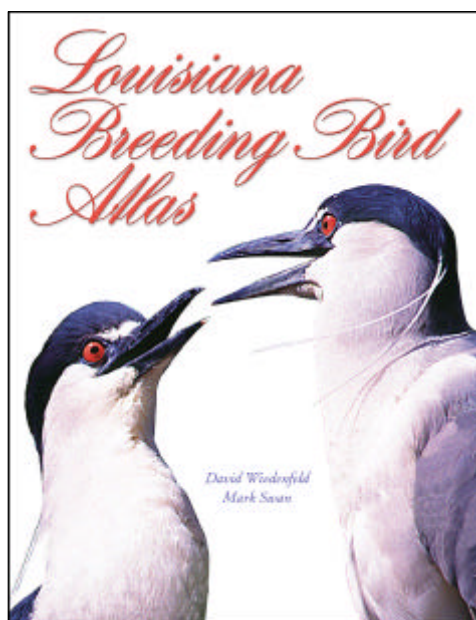
California Bulrush (*Schoenoplectous californicus*), is the second wetland plant to be featured in a new series of planting guides from NRCS and the LSU AgCenter.

The first of such guides features Smooth Cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), a plant commonly used in coastal restoration projects. The second of the series will focus on California Bulrush (*Schoenoplectous californicus*), formally of the genus *Scirpus*. Additional planting guides will feature wetland plants such as Bitter Panicum, Black Mangrove, Sea Oats and Seashore Paspalum. Free copies of each guide can be obtained as they become available by contacting Mike Materne at NRCS 225-389-0335 (mmaterne@earthlink.net) or Rex Caffey at the LSU Agricultural Center (225) 578-2266 (rcaffey@agctr.lsu.edu).



New Atlas of Louisiana Breeding Birds

The first illustrated "Louisiana's Breeding Bird Atlas" was published in April 2000 by the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program. The Atlas is the result of a 3-year study from 1994 to 1996 involving 186 volunteers and more than 9,000 hours of surveying statewide. During this period, breeding status was documented for 161 bird species and recorded on state quad maps indicating areas of possible, probable and confirmed breeding. The Atlas depicts these maps individually for each species, along with hemisphere maps indicating additional breeding and wintering regions. Each species is brilliantly illustrated using color photographs or paintings accompanied by accounts of species distribution, feeding and nesting habits.



Breeding status for 161 Louisiana bird species is brilliantly portrayed in the newly released "Louisiana Breeding Bird Atlas".

The 80-page atlas was written by David Wiedenfeld of the Louisiana Natural Heritage Program and M. Mark Swan of the Nature Conservancy of Louisiana. Additional funding and support for the atlas was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cannon U.S.A. Inc., the USGS Gap Analysis Program, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources.

Copies are available for \$15 (plus tax) and can be obtained by contacting Elizabeth Coleman (225) 578-6449 (ecolema@lsu.edu), Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, Communications Office, Sea Grant Building, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803.



2000-2001 Waterfowl Season Proposed by LDWF

On August 3, 2000, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries unveiled tentative dates and bag limits for migratory waterfowl hunting in the 2000-2001 season. If approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the proposed measures would equate to the fourth time since 1997 that Louisiana hunters enjoy a 60-day, six-ducks-per-day season. The proposal contrasts earlier predictions of fewer waterfowl caused by water shortages on North American and Canadian breeding grounds in early 2000. Late spring rains replenished much of the prairie habitat, and preliminary predictions have this year's migration at or above 1998 levels.

Despite these optimistic predictions, the prevailing drought in South Louisiana is likely to once again impede hunting efforts. Without adequate rainfall, many favorite duck ponds remain unseasonably dry. According to Mike Olinde, LDWF biologist, the situation is especially critical in coastal Louisiana, who said, "Drought conditions have favored the production of annual grasses but hindered growth of submerged aquatics...rainfall at this point might ensure a decent teal season but could come too late to replenish the food sources required to attract later migrating species."

Public comments on the proposed season are being accepted by LDWF through the end of August. The final ratification will be made by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission in September.



Tentative 2000-2001 Migratory Waterfowl Seasons

Source: Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Shooting Hours: One-half hour before official sunrise to official sunset

DUCKS, COOTS & MERGANSERS

West Zone: Nov. 11-Dec. 3 (23 days) & Dec. 16-Jan 21, 2001 (37 days).

East Zone & Catahoula Lake Zone: Nov. 18-Dec. 3 (16 days) & Dec. 9-Jan. 21, 2001 (44 days)

Youth Waterfowl Days: (Statewide): Jan. 27-28, 2001

Daily Bag Limit

Ducks: 6 ducks per day, of which there can be no more than four mallards (no more than two can be hens), three mottled ducks, three scaup (dos gris), two wood ducks, two redheads, one pintail, one black duck, and one canvasback. Possession limit is twice the daily limit.

Coots: 15. Possession limit is 30.

Mergansers: 5, only one of which may be a hooded merganser (Merganser limits are in addition to the daily bag limit for ducks.) Possession is twice the daily limit.

BLUE, SNOW, ROSS' & SPECKLEBELLY GEESE

East Zone: Oct. 28-Dec. 3 (37 days) & Dec. 9-Jan 26, 2001 (49 days).

West Zone: Nov. 11-Dec. 10 (30 days) & Dec. 16-Feb 9, 2001 (56 days)

Daily Bag Limit

Blue, Snow and Ross' geese: 20. No possession limit.

Specklebellies: 2. Possession limit is 4.

Conservation Order Season: (Blue, Snow and Ross' geese only) West Zone: Dec 11-15 (5 days) & Feb 10-March 11, 2001 (30 days) East Zone: Dec. 4-Dec. 8 (5 days) & Jan 29-march 11, 2001 (42 days)

The Conservation Order allows the use of electronic calls, unplugged shotguns, one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset shooting hours and no daily or possession limits.

Special Canada Goose Season: Jan. 16-24, 2001. The daily bag limit for Canada geese is one and two for specklebelly geese. Possession limit is twice the daily bag limit.

TEAL (cinnamon, blue-winged and green winged teal only)

Sept. 15-30; daily bag limit 4, possession limit 8.

RAILS

Nov. 11-Jan. 3, 2001 (53 days). Daily bag limit for king and clapper rails is 15 in the aggregate. Possession limit is 30 after opening day. Daily bag limit and possession limit for sora and virginia rails is 25 in the aggregate.

GALLINULES

Nov. 11-Jan. 3, 2001 (53 days). Daily bag limit 15. Possession limit is 30.

SNIPE

Nov. 4-Dec. 3 (30 days) & Dec. 14-Feb 28, 2001 (77 days). Daily limit is 8. Possession limit is 16.



Coastal Wetlands Workshop On the Lower River at West Pointe a la Hache

Join the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana for a day-long Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Workshop Saturday, October 28, 2000 at West Pointe a la Hache in Plaquemines parish. Explore the lower Mississippi River and surrounding marshes by boat and seaplane. Learn first hand how river water builds and restores wetlands

Participants must register. Space is limited to 45, so early registration is recommended. The workshop fee of \$80.00 includes a two hour boat tour, airplane tour, speaker presentations, discussion, coffee, lunch and afternoon refreshments. Field trips depend on weather and boat availability. Substitutions will be made in case of inclement weather. The workshop is supported by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation/Shell Marine Habitat Program. For more information call the Coalition at 1-888-LA COAST (1-888-522-6278).

Participants will travel twenty minutes by seaplane to view the Mississippi River, healthy and broken marshes, land-building, and open water. They will enjoy a two hour boat tour of Plaquemines' salt marshes and productive oyster beds. They will visit a working oyster boat and learn how water quality affects this traditional way of life. Participants will travel to waterways, shorelines, and camp sites that mark wetland to water changes over time. Participants will also observe how the West Pointe a Hache siphon brings fresh river water into nearby marshes. Throughout, speakers will talk about how wetlands are being restored, water quality, and what citizens can do to help. The workshop will be headquartered at Woodland Plantation, a rare landmark built in 1834 and recently restored as a country inn. The Plaquemines Parish Economic Development Department (1-888-745-0642) will provide a list of overnight accommodations.



ENERGY COMMITTEE REPORTS OUT CARA BILL

After passing the U.S. House of Representatives by a majority in May (315 to 103), the Conservation and Reinvestment Act, (CARA), H.R.701 was voted out of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and sent to the Senate floor. The CARA measure ensures that as the nation depletes its non-renewable resources of oil and gas, moneys earned from those resources will be reinvested in all 50 states.

The \$2.99 billion in CARA funds would target programs for coastal impact assistance, coastal marine fisheries, coral reef restoration and protection, state wildlife, urban parks and recreation, urban and community forestry, historic preservation, restoration of national parks and lands, farm and ranch land, threatened forests, rural community development and assistance, youth job corps, and compensatory in-lieu taxes.

However, it is the \$450 million authorized under CARA for the Land and Water Conservation Fund that has many western senators concerned over the bill's potential to expand the federal acquisition of private lands. The land acquisition issue is viewed as the critical hurdle to a Senate vote as Congress convenes between September 6th and October 6th.



A variety of programs are slated for funding under CARA including \$430 million dollars of annual coastal impact assistance to these seven states supporting oil and gas production on the outer continental shelf.



Newsletter "Purge" Completed

In compliance with federal law, our mailing list was purged during the Spring 2000 issue. Recipients were asked to fill out and return forms requesting the continuation of their subscriptions. We appreciate your interest in this newsletter and welcome your input. Please send any questions or comments to the address below:

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Sincerely,

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