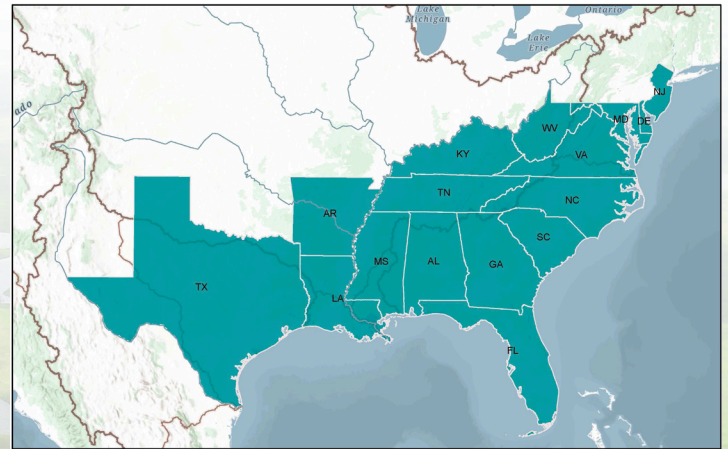


USDA WORKING LANDS FOR WILDLIFE

Working for Healthy Waterways and Farmlands

The Aquatic Connectivity Framework (ACF) by Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) brings together public and private partners to tackle critical threats to watersheds across 16 states in the eastern and central U.S. These regions are vital for agricultural production and biodiversity, stretching from the Gulf and South Atlantic coasts to Appalachia and the southern Ozarks. The ACF aims to protect water quality, support wildlife, and promote sustainable agricultural practices for resilient and productive lands.



States participating in the Aquatic Connectivity Framework

WLFW uses win-win solutions to target voluntary, incentive-based conservation that improves agricultural productivity and wildlife habitat on working lands. Through the Farm Bill, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to landowners who voluntarily commit to improving their lands. With WLFW, NRCS helps farmers and ranchers address significant threats to aquatic ecosystems while boosting agricultural productivity.

BUILDING ON A LEGACY OF SUCCESS

The Aquatic Connectivity Framework builds on the aquatic conservation successes of Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) initiatives, including species-specific efforts like the Eastern Hellbender, Bog Turtle, and American Black Duck initiatives, as well as watershed-focused efforts like the Conasauga River and Colorado River Initiatives. These programs have demonstrated how collaborative efforts between NRCS, farmers, ranchers, and other partners can improve habitat health, protect at-risk species, and promote effective watershed management.

This Framework extends that work by prioritizing the restoration or preservation of aquatic connectivity and addressing key threats to aquatic systems across the landscape.



A Framework for Conservation Action



Conservation Objectives and Planned Actions

JOINING FORCES TO ADDRESS CRITICAL THREATS

The ACF addresses four significant threats to aquatic ecosystems: wetland and farmland losses, erosion and sedimentation, elevated stream temperatures, and barriers to aquatic movement. By focusing efforts on priority watersheds and integrating scientific research, expert knowledge, and local priorities, the ACF directs conservation actions to where they are most urgently needed.



THREAT: LAND USE CONVERSION

Objective: Protect and restore connected wetlands and productive agricultural lands by addressing the impacts of land use conversion and sea level rise.

Planned Actions: Restore and protect vital wetland functions across watersheds to mitigate the effects of land use changes. Provide landowners facing sea level rise with engineering and financial solutions to adapt to shifting landscapes and sustain agricultural productivity.



THREAT: SURFACE RUNOFF FROM AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Objective: Reduce risks of soil erosion and pollutant runoff from agricultural lands entering waterways.

Planned Action: Install sustainable crop and grazing conservation practices like reduced tillage, prescribed grazing, and field buffers.



THREAT: ELEVATED IN-STREAM WATER TEMPERATURES

Objective: Establish riparian buffers to provide essential shade, stabilize streambanks, and reduce evaporation, creating healthier aquatic environments for temperature-sensitive species like trout. Additionally, use lessons learned in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene (2024) to use forest buffers to reduce farm and community impacts from storm surges.

Planned Action: Restore riparian buffers to regulate water temperatures, improve habitat quality, and mitigate storm damages along streams.



THREAT: INSTREAM BARRIERS

Objective: Reconnect fragmented waterways to restore water flow, enable fish and other species to migrate, reproduce, and thrive while supporting recreational fishing and boating and boating safety.

Planned Action: Remove outdated culverts and small dams to restore physical stream connectivity to enhance habitat conditions and recreation.

GET INVOLVED

Interested in taking action? Contact your local NRCS service center to get started. For more information, visit the NRCS Service Center Locator: <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs> and select your state and county.

For more information about the Aquatic Connectivity Framework contact josselyn.lucas@landscapepartnership.org or visit the aquatics page on the Landscape Partnership Portal at <https://landscapepartnership.org/aquatics>.

Aquatic
Connectivity
Framework

