

## ***Rachel Carson NWR and southern Maine: identifying and protecting habitat for endangered, threatened, and declining fish and wildlife species***

### **Gulf of Maine Coastal Program**

The southern coast of Maine, stretching for 45 miles from Kittery to Cape Elizabeth, contains miles of barrier beaches, expansive salt marshes and an intriguing mixture of southern and northern plant and animal communities. This region boasts the greatest biodiversity statewide and provides vital migratory habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, anadromous and marine fish, and other species. However, southern coastal Maine, already one of the most densely settled areas in the state, is once again experiencing the pressures of rapid development that contribute to habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation. Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, and state and privately managed conservation lands protect important habitat. But more needs to be done, in coordination with willing landowners, federal and state agencies, statewide conservation groups, local land trusts and town planners to protect additional lands.

In order to protect fish and wildlife habitat for endangered, threatened or declining species in the region, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Gulf of Maine Program, in cooperation with Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, initiated this project to identify, map and rank important fish and wildlife habitat. USFWS biologists selected 43 migratory birds or anadromous and estuarine fish that routinely inhabit southern coastal Maine that are:

- nationally endangered, threatened or declining,
- listed as endangered or threatened in Maine, or
- listed as endangered or threatened in two of three nearby states (ME, NH, MA).

Biologists have identified ranked and mapped habitat for all species by developing habitat suitability models, based on actual sightings and environmental requirements for each species. Based on species-specific maps, biologists have also developed a composite map ranking important habitat for all 45 species regionwide, and another composite map identifying priority grassland, forest, freshwater wetland and estuarine habitat. Large unfragmented natural areas and existing conservation lands in the region have also been identified. All of this mapped information is available on a CD that can help conservationists focus land protection efforts towards the protection of individual species or groups of species, specific habitat types, large areas and corridors to link existing protected lands.

Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge staff, working in cooperation with willing landowners, will use the results of this analysis to focus potential Refuge acquisition in areas with highest wildlife values for the species evaluated. In addition, the Coastal Mosaic Project, sponsored by the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, is making our habitat maps available to help catalyze voluntary habitat protection partnerships with interested individuals, land trusts, conservation commissions, statewide conservation organizations and state and federal agencies. Where habitat values are nationally significant, federal matching funds may be available to support land acquisition by conservation partners.

***Read the technical report and view habitat maps by referring to our Internet site.***



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