



Endangered Species

# WETLANDS



Photos Courtesy of Puerto Rico DNER and U.S. EPA

## MANY ENDANGERED SPECIES DEPEND ON WETLANDS

- ▶ Almost 40% of endangered and 60% of threatened plant and animal species rely on wetland habitats.
- ▶ The nation's coastal estuaries, wetlands, and waterways provide migratory stopover, feeding, and breeding habitat for 85% of waterfowl and migratory birds.
- ▶ There are 125 endangered or threatened wetland plants—17% of the total number of endangered plant species.
- ▶ In the continental United States, two-thirds of all waterfowl—or some 6.7 to 8 million birds—reproduce in prairie potholes of the Midwest.

## RESTORED WETLANDS HELP CRANES REBOUND

The rarest of all 15 crane species, the whooping crane is a migratory bird on the federal endangered species list that resides exclusively in North America. Whooping cranes winter in the coastal marshes of Texas, and rely on the prairie wetlands of the Plains states during migration to Canada.

Preservation of wetland habitats along the whooping cranes' migratory path is critical to ensure their survival as the cranes require the shallow wetland waters to feed, nest, and roost. Pollution and habitat loss pose major threats to the cranes. In fact, the conversion of wetlands for agriculture and urban development helped cause the whooping crane population to drop to an all-time low of 15 individuals. Shoreline erosion and drought and other extreme weather conditions resulting from climate change continue to threaten whooping crane habitats today. Diverted water for agriculture and consumption reduces the amount of water in wetlands and continued construction and barge traffic along coastal waterways can bring in pollutants and chemicals that threaten wetland habitats.

Wetland management constitutes an important piece of whooping crane protection. In Wisconsin, where over 75% of the wetlands are privately owned, many federal and state financial incentive programs are available to help landowners to restore or maintain wetlands. Habitat restoration programs, such as those available in Wisconsin, in combination with captive breeding efforts, have allowed the whooping crane population to rebound to about 500 birds, of which 350 live in the wild.

## WETLANDS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Species that live in ephemeral wetlands—such as vernal pools, playas, and prairie potholes—may be especially vulnerable to climate change. The fairy shrimp, an endangered species inhabiting vernal pools in the Southwest, requires both wet and dry environments during its lifecycle. As the vernal pool fills with water, fairy shrimp can have as little as two weeks to hatch, eat, grow, reproduce, and lay eggs before their ephemeral pool disappears. Drier conditions in the Southwest, expected with climate change, could affect this delicate timing by causing pools to disappear quicker, threatening the survival of many endangered species.

# National Wetlands Awards

*For the past 20 years, the National Wetlands Awards program has honored leaders in wetland conservation, research, and education. These wetland champions personify the concept of “think globally, act locally,” dedicating countless hours and resources to our nation’s wetlands.*

## MAKING AN IMPACT



Photos Courtesy of Joe Colon

2008 Conservation and Restoration recipient Mildred Ramos Majoros, a resident of Miami, Florida and native of Puerto Rico, demonstrated the importance of wetland restoration in preserving endangered species. When plans for a large luxury resort were announced for the northeastern shore of Puerto Rico, a public outcry—including demonstrations with school children waving signs reading, “Save the Turtles” and “Welcome Leatherbacks”—led by Ms. Majoros’ group, forced the government to reconsider and establish the San Miguel Natural Reserve, which serves as an important nesting ground for endangered leatherback turtles.

Ms. Majoros, a project manager with the Trust for Public Land, worked with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources to obtain appraisals, surveys, environmental assessments, title work, and secure substantial grant funding. She promoted public awareness for the Reserve and received praise for her innovative strategies, determination, and engagement of landowners to voluntarily sell property for the Reserve. Said one official, “Mildred Majoros’ dedication and commitment seeing the San Miguel acquisition through...are nothing short of heroic.” Ms. Majoros noted, “It has been a particular honor for me to preserve in my homeland of Puerto Rico, a special piece of paradise.”

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**LEARN** more about wetland habitats and restoration efforts in your area, at [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org).

**VISIT** us online, check out former National Wetland Awards recipients at [nationalwetlandsawards.org](http://nationalwetlandsawards.org).

**CONTACT** your state wetland program or your local natural heritage program at [www.natureserve.org/visitLocal](http://www.natureserve.org/visitLocal).

**VOLUNTEER** with a local conservation group or floodplain restoration project.

**EDUCATE** friends, family, local reporters, and elected officials about the importance of wetlands.

**PROTECT** wetlands on your own land. Find out how at [www.aswm.org/fwp/consultant/index.htm#guides](http://www.aswm.org/fwp/consultant/index.htm#guides).

*The National Wetlands Awards are administered by the Environmental Law Institute and supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Forest Service, Federal Highway Administration, and NOAA Fisheries.*