



Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program

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PARTNERS

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- Richard King Mellon Foundation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

ABOUT NFWF

Chartered by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 5,000 organizations and generated a total conservation impact of \$6.1 billion.

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NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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Ruffed grouse

BACKGROUND

The Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program was established in 2017 to improve the quality and connectivity of forest and freshwater habitat and increase the distribution and abundance of native fish, birds and other wildlife, as evidenced by a suite of species that collectively are indicators of forest and freshwater habitat condition.

Grants are awarded in portions of the Appalachian region of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia. Priority is given to projects within 10 focal geographies. These geographies were selected by analyzing large watersheds for priority forest and freshwater habitat for target species, with a goal of sustaining and improving large, contiguous blocks of the highest quality habitat.

From 2017 through 2021, the Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program has awarded more than \$9.8 million in funding to 61 projects to enhance forest age and structural diversity, improve aquatic habitat connectivity and increase the abundance of key species. Grantees are providing more than \$12.5 million in match for a total conservation impact of more than \$22 million. Key partners in the effort are the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

(continued)



Eastern brook trout

Together, these 61 projects are expected to:

- Open 357 miles of stream for eastern brook trout by prioritizing and removing barriers to fish passage, including replacing culverts and removing under-utilized dams.
- Improve 17,400 acres of young forest habitat for golden-winged warbler, 13,134 acres of middle-aged forest for wood thrush and 5,593 acres of mature forest for cerulean warbler.
- Re-introduce 100,000 freshwater mussel species to targeted watersheds, especially those that have had significant dam removals or flow regime changes that would increase potential for reproductive success.
- Install 180 nest boxes and rock slabs to increase available nesting and cover habitat for hellbenders.

PROGRAM GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Fund are to:

- Improve the management of public and private forestlands in order to create blocks with a mosaic of mixed-aged forests that support a diversity of bird and wildlife species, especially targeting golden-winged

warbler, wood thrush and cerulean warbler.

- Bolster populations of eastern brook trout, eastern hellbender and native freshwater mussels by removing barriers to fish passage, restoring riparian and in-stream habitat, and improving water quality and hydrology.

The program achieves these goals through four priority strategies:

- Restore and manage dynamic forest blocks to enhance age and structural diversity that demonstrates improved forest conditions for golden-winged warbler, wood thrush and cerulean warbler.
- Target outreach and assistance to key forest landowners and practitioners in order to grow the universe of willing landowners and knowledgeable practitioners and lay the groundwork to take the dynamic forest block approach to scale.
- Sustain and improve habitat quality and connectivity within and between eastern brook trout population patches.
- Increase eastern hellbender populations, and the abundance and diversity of native freshwater mussels.