

A CALL TO ACTION



TURNING THE TIDE FOR THE SALTMARSH SPARROW

*Together we can save
a species threatened by rising seas.*

The saltmarsh sparrow -- the only bird species that breeds solely in the salt marshes of the Northeast -- could face extinction due to rising seas. Scientists estimate the population is 13 percent of what it was in the mid 1990s.

With your help, we can put it back on track.

What do we need to do?

We need to take action to provide 23,000 acres of high-quality saltmarsh sparrow breeding habitat by 2030 from Maine to Virginia, to halt the population decline.

Can we do it?

With saltmarsh sparrow still using thousands of sites throughout the breeding range, we have the opportunity to conserve the species if we act together, quickly and decisively. The key to viability is to provide sufficient high-quality breeding habitat that supports reproductive success -- resulting in a stable or growing saltmarsh sparrow population.

How can you help?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing an executive committee of state and federal partners that will secure conservation commitments from stakeholders, provide funding, influence policy and regulations, and maintain momentum and accountability toward conservation objectives.

Why is the sparrow declining?

Rising sea levels are bringing higher tide and storm surges that increasingly flood nests in high marsh habitat that was rarely flooded in past decades. When nests flood frequently, eggs may float away and chicks often drown -- this, along with nest predation, is the primary reason the saltmarsh sparrow population has been declining annually by an estimated 9 percent. Past alterations of salt marshes, such as extensive ditching and tidal restrictions, have also exacerbated flooding.

What's the sparrow's status?

The saltmarsh sparrow is a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in all states in which it breeds, and state wildlife agencies identified it as a Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need in both the Northeast and Southeast.

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV) identified the sparrow as a flagship species, and has released the Salt Marsh Bird and the Saltmarsh Sparrow conservation plans to guide work.

In 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will make a determination whether listing the saltmarsh sparrow under the Endangered Species Act is warranted.

Join us in this significant conservation effort

We must immediately start to improve breeding conditions and restore high marsh habitat for the saltmarsh sparrow and other species that rely on this habitat.

Establishing a long-term resilient population includes two phases:

- 1) Immediately initiate work to stabilize the population and prevent a drop to below 10,000 birds, which would significantly increase extinction risk, by providing 23,000 acres of high-quality habitat;
- 2) Grow the population to at least 25,000 birds on 80,000 acres of high-quality habitat so it is self-sustaining, has improved resilience, and maintains redundancy and representation.

Partners and stakeholders in the states constituting each geographic unit (below) should work collaboratively to achieve, at a minimum, the listed acreages of high-quality breeding habitat to support a long-term resilient population.

Table 1. Saltmarsh sparrow minimum short-term, and long-term habitat goals for each Geographic Unit in its breeding range.

Geographic Unit (states)	Acres of High-Quality Habitat by 2030	Acres of High-Quality Habitat by 2069
Northern (ME, NH, MA)	2,645	12,423
Central (CT, RI, NY)	2,274	7,048
Southern (NJ, DE, MD, VA)	18,024	60,134
TOTAL	22,943	79,605

Healthy coastal marshes protect property and infrastructure from flooding, provide clean water, and support multi-billion dollar fishery, recreation, and tourism industries. Investing in our marshes is good for saltmarsh sparrows and good for people.

Not all high marsh habitat is equal

Most current high marsh habitat is not supporting population growth. We need high-quality breeding habitat to achieve our objectives. High quality habitat has:

- Portions of higher elevation with low flooding frequency with at least a 24-day window
- Extensive and dense *S. patens* vegetation, with a deep, well-developed thatch layer
- Few modifications, such as ditches or tidal restrictions

The ACJV Saltmarsh Sparrow Conservation Plan outlines strategies to restore and enhance salt marsh, engage new partners, facilitate planning and permitting, and enhance sparrow populations.



High quality marsh habitat in New Jersey. Ray Hennessy

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