



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# National Fish Passage Program Southeast Region

*Providing Passage in Many Ways*

*The goal of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish Passage Program is to restore native fish and other aquatic species populations by reconnecting habitats that are fragmented by artificial barriers.*

## **An Area Rich in Aquatic Species**

The southeastern U.S. is home to over 60% of all the fish species within North America north of Mexico. The area is also rich in other aquatic faunas including freshwater mussels, snails, aquatic insects, and crayfishes. These species support recreational and commercial fisheries valued at hundreds of millions of dollars and they occupy a key component in the region's leisure activities.

Dams, channelization, dredging, mining, and exotic species heavily impact aquatic resources within the Southeast. All have worked in concert to physically degrade habitats, decrease or eliminate water flows, and fragment and displace native populations. As a result over 20% of the region's fish and 70% of the mussels are either extinct or imperiled.

## **The Status of Fish Passage in the Southeast**

Of the original 3.2 million miles of river in the United States, only 42 high-quality free-flowing rivers greater than 120 miles in length remain. Very few of these occur in the Southeast.



*Rains Mill Dam before (above) and after (below) removal. Mike Wicker/USFWS photo.*

Of the 150 river reaches designated as Wild and Scenic, only 17 occur in the Southeast. Few Federal and State programs are being actively pursued to protect them.

### **What is the Fish Passage Program?**

In the Southeast Region, the Fish Passage Program provides technical assistance and Federal funds to remove, replace, or retrofit artificial barriers, design and construct fishways, support surveys of important watersheds; and monitor the effectiveness of these actions. Funds may be used for projects on both public and private lands, but cannot be used on hydroelectric projects licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Cost sharing by partners is encouraged and essential to the program.

### **Program Accomplishments**

Since establishment in 1999, the Fish Passage Program and its partners in the Southeast Region, have initiated 17 projects that improved fish passage in a variety of ways.

Projects that identify barriers, plan watershed passage needs, remove artificial barriers, provide fishway designs and structure, identify alternative operating procedures for locks and dams, and monitor ecosystem responses have directly improved passage to over 800 miles of riverine habitat. An additional 1,500 miles have been indirectly improved by these projects. For example, removal of the Rains Mill Dam on the Little River of North Carolina opened up 151 miles of suitable spawning habitat to a variety of migratory species including American shad, striped bass, Atlantic sturgeon, and shortnose sturgeon.

Post-removal studies of fish movement were also funded by the Fish Passage Program to assess the true benefits of removal. A



*Fish Passage Program projects address a variety of needs. Research to determine alternative lock operation scenarios to optimize fish passage was carried out at the Claiborne Lock & Dam on the Alabama River. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers photo.*

study of migratory fish movement before and after removal of the Quaker Neck Dam in North Carolina determined that the dam was blocking access to the most desirable spawning habitat within the entire river system.

Not all fish passage projects are related to removal. Funding was provided for two fishway design projects on the Culebrinas and Guaynes Rivers of Puerto Rico. These designs proved challenging since the fishways not only had to provide passage for fish, but also for thirteen species of migratory shrimp. Actual funding for the fishways was provided through a partnership with the local water authority.

The Southeast Fish Passage Program also coordinates with partners to plan watershed fish passage needs. Together, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources prepared the Santee-Cooper Basin Diadromous Fish Passage Restoration Plan.

### **For more information on the Fish Passage Program in the Southeast, please contact:**

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