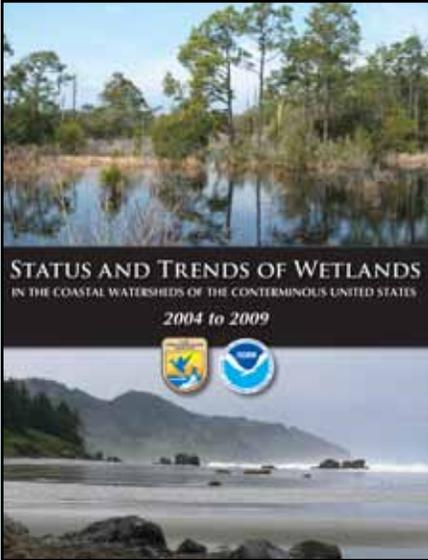


NOAA FISHERIES Habitat Conservation



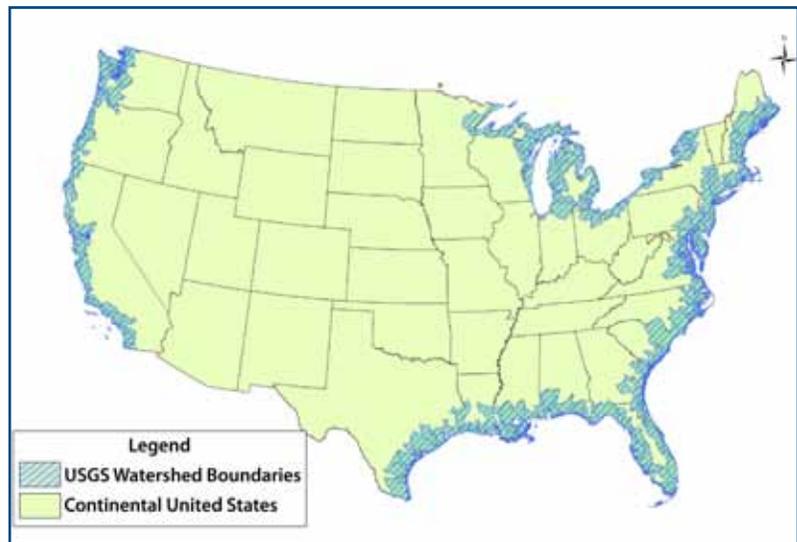
Status and Trends of the Wetlands, 2004-2009

Status and Trends of Wetlands in Coastal Watersheds

NOAA has authored a new report, “*Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Coastal Watersheds of the Conterminous United States 2004-2009*,” with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

What’s Happening to Our Coastal Wetlands?

According to the report findings, the coastal watersheds in the continental United States lost an estimated 360,720 acres of wetlands from 2004 to 2009. The average rate of loss for that time period was 80,000 acres a year. That breaks down to losing seven football fields an hour! This is a 25 percent increase over the previous 6-year study period.



What Do These Losses Mean?

Wetlands provide crucial habitat, spawning grounds, nurseries, shelter, and food for commercially important fish species. Freshwater wetlands in the upper parts of coastal watersheds support estuaries upon which nearly 50 percent of the commercially harvested fish and shellfish, and 80 percent of the recreational catch in the U.S., depend. Simply put, the disappearance of this valuable habitat could be detrimental to our nation’s seafood supply.

Fish are not the only beneficiaries of healthy wetlands. Wetlands act as a filter to improve water quality and detoxify runoff from residential, agricultural, and urban areas.

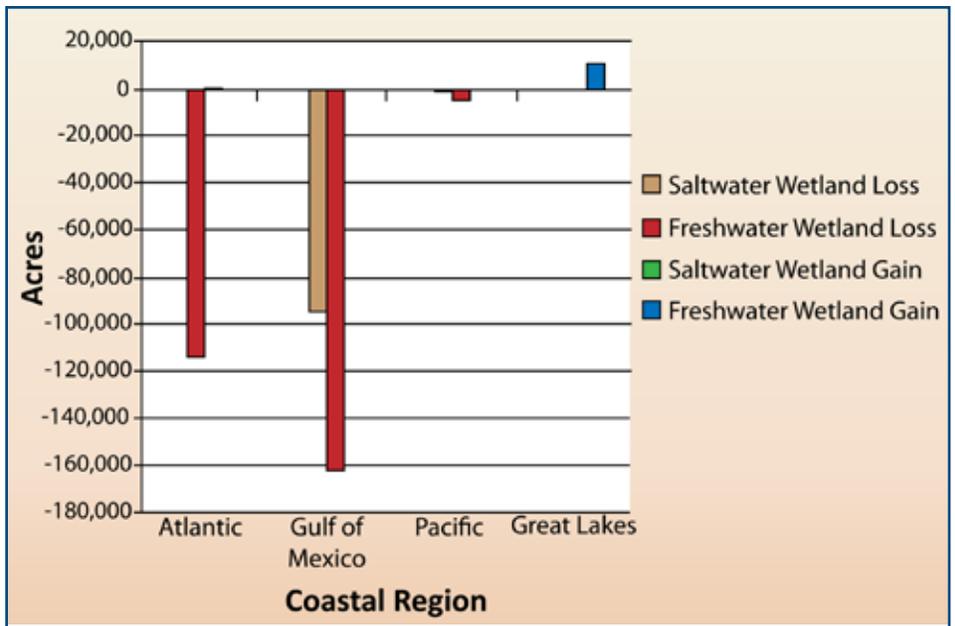
Wetlands can also lessen the impact of strong storms by acting as a barrier to slow storm momentum. With almost half of the U.S. population living in coastal counties, continued loss of coastal wetlands means less protection for those communities from strong storms, such as Superstorm Sandy.

Changes in Wetlands by Region

In 2009, there were an estimated 41.1 million acres of wetlands in the coastal watersheds of the United States. That is 37 percent of total wetland area in the continental U.S. Of the wetland areas in the coastal watersheds, 84 percent were freshwater and 16 percent were saltwater.

The Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Pacific coastal regions experienced net wetland losses of 111,960 acres, 257,150 acres and 5,220 acres, respectively. The watersheds of the Great Lakes region experienced a net gain in wetland area of an estimated 13,610 acres.

Seventy-one percent of the estimated wetland losses were in the coastal watersheds of the Gulf of Mexico. Rather than being concentrated only in Louisiana, a wide swath of wetlands were lost from Galveston, Texas to Tampa Bay, Florida.



Causes of Wetland Loss

U.S. watersheds lost both saltwater and freshwater wetlands between 2004 and 2009. Freshwater, forested wetlands were lost at the highest rate, although there was also an increase in the loss of estuarine wetlands, most likely due to the severe storms of 2004 and 2005.

Development and some activities related to tree farming were responsible for the majority of the freshwater wetland losses.



Forested wetland near Weeks Bay, Alabama



Storm damage and saltwater inundation in North Carolina from Hurricane Irene, 2011.

Additional Resources Online

To read the full report and learn more about how NOAA and partners are working to protect and restore wetlands in our coastal watersheds, please visit: www.habitat.noaa.gov/coastalwetlandsreport