

# News Release

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## **New Report Assesses the Impacts of Emerging Threats on Gulf Coast Species and Ecosystems**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released its Gulf Coast Vulnerability Assessment (GCVA), a comprehensive report that evaluates the effects of climate change, sea level rise and urbanization on four Gulf Coast ecosystems and 11 species that depend on them. The ecosystems are mangrove, oyster reef, tidal emergent marsh and barrier islands. The species are roseate spoonbill, blue crab, clapper rail, mottled duck, spotted seatrout, eastern oyster, American oystercatcher, red drum, black skimmer, Kemp's ridley sea turtle and Wilson's plover.

Of the species assessed, Kemp's ridley sea turtle is thought to be the most vulnerable species across the Gulf Coast. Experts identified its main threat as loss of nesting habitat to sea level rise, erosion, and urbanization. Tidal emergent marsh is considered to be the most vulnerable ecosystem, due in part to sea level rise and erosion. In general, avian species were more vulnerable than fish because of nesting habitat loss to sea level rise, erosion and potential increases in storm surge.

“The Gulf Coast region supports some of the most diverse species and ecosystems in the world,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. “It also faces some of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time. The Gulf Coast Vulnerability Assessment will help our agency identify and assess areas that are susceptible to climate change and other stressors while working with our partners to protect and conserve this ecological safe haven for generations to come.”

The GCVA was initiated by four Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) that cover the Gulf of Mexico: Gulf Coast Prairie, Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks, South Atlantic, and Peninsular Florida. The LCCs are partnerships among federal agencies, states, tribes, non-governmental organizations, universities and other entities that collaboratively address broad-scale conservation issues in a defined geographic area.

The LCCs received support and guidance for the assessment from many partners, including the Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Northern Gulf Institute, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, and the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

“In the next 100 years, accelerated sea level rise, changing winter climate extremes, altered river flows and coastal development will greatly change coastal landscapes across the Gulf region,” said USGS Research Ecologist Mike Osland. “In parallel to the GCVA, the USGS has partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the four Gulf Coast LCCs to identify barriers and opportunities for the landward migration of tidal saline wetlands along the U.S. Gulf coast. These studies can assist in increasing the adaptive capacity of our coastal wetlands to help ensure that future generations have access to the many goods and services provided by these important coastal ecosystems.”

The GCVA will guide future conservation and restoration efforts by helping conservation partners across the Gulf identify vulnerable areas where they can focus critical resources. In addition, the document pinpoints additional research needed to better anticipate impacts to coastal ecosystems and species along the northern Gulf of Mexico.

To learn more about the GCVA visit: <http://gulfoastprairielcc.org/science/science-projects/gulf-coast-vulnerability-assessment/>. To learn more about the Landscape Conservation Cooperative Network visit: <http://lccnetwork.org/>.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#), and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).*

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