

SOUTHERN WINGS PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE REPORT



Full Annual Cycle Conservation for Migratory Birds



cerulean warbler

Southern Wings is a collaborative conservation initiative that empowers U.S. state fish and wildlife agencies to conserve migratory birds across their full annual cycle—especially during the non-breeding season in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

THE CHALLENGE

- **Steep Declines in Migratory Birds:** Nearly all of America's birds have declined over the past 50 years, with neotropical migratory species facing disproportionate threats.
- **Cross-Border Dependency:** Migratory birds rely on diverse habitats across continents. Without conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean, domestic efforts in the U.S. are undermined.
- **Concentrated Threats:** In smaller geographies like Central and South America, habitat loss or degradation affect large portions of bird populations due to their spatial concentration.

SOUTHERN WINGS: A PROVEN SOLUTION

- **Impact to Date:** \$4.2M in state contributions, \$9M in partner match, 1.5M+ acres protected, 800,000+ trees planted, and benefits to 81 priority species.
- **Model of Success:** Inspired by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and Fall Flights, Southern Wings demonstrates that targeted, collaborative investment works.



yellow-billed cuckoo



redhead duck



wood thrush

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE

1 SET CLEAR, STATE-SPECIFIC INVESTMENT GOALS

- Adopt a transparent, fair funding formula that encourages states to meet identified benchmarks and achieve the programmatic goal of \$2 M. Base the formula on each state's migratory bird conservation priorities and number of recreational birdwatchers (a key user group).
- **Outcome:** Equitable, science-based state investment goals that clarify shared responsibility.

2 LAUNCH A RECOGNITION PROGRAM

- **Tiered Recognition:** Acknowledges state leadership and commitment to full annual cycle conservation.
- **Purpose:** Incentivizes new and continued support, while allowing for flexible participation.

3 GOVERNANCE & PROGRAM EFFICIENCY

- **Short-Term Action:** Establish a dedicated AFWA Southern Wings Advisory Committee for strategic oversight. (like Fall Flights).
- **Long-Term Goals:**
 - Plan for a part-time coordinator position when contributions reach key thresholds.
 - Explore streamlined mechanisms to improve fund disbursement and partner coordination—without sacrificing state agency flexibility.

4 STRATEGIC OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION

- **Develop a Comprehensive Strategy:** Implement a national marketing and communications strategy focused on conservation return on investment (ROI) and state-specific benefits.
- **Spring 2026 Campaign:** Launch a coordinated Spring 2026 outreach campaign tied to migration season.
- **Funding:** Identify and pursue alternative funding sources, including NGO partnerships and new federal or philanthropic streams.

EXPAND PARTICIPATION
AND IMPACT

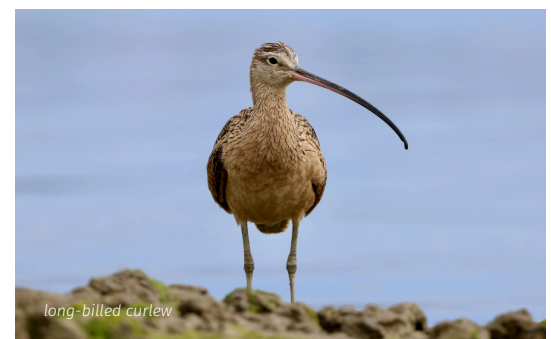
POLICY RELEVANCE AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Migratory birds generate significant economic returns:

- 96 million Americans participated in birdwatching in 2022
- Birdwatching contributed \$279 billion in total economic output
- Supported 1.4 million jobs

Southern Wings not only supports biodiversity — it protects a major economic driver in states, from tourism to recreation.

Southern Wings is a proven, cost-effective vehicle for advancing the state's conservation leadership on a hemispheric scale and achieving state level conservation objectives. The Task Force's roadmap provides actionable, scalable steps for states to strengthen their role in reversing migratory bird declines — while supporting economic development, outdoor recreation, and ecological resilience.



The Task Force recognizes the numerous challenges faced by state fish and wildlife agencies—and acknowledges that they are adapting to a changing landscape. However, it stresses that we must plan for the future now by establishing a clear, forward-looking conservation vision that Southern Wings and its partners can collectively champion.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

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