

The **Endangered Species Act (ESA)** received a boost this week as the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service jointly finalized three ESA rules that impact how critical habitats are designated and managed.

“By leveraging the best available science, we ensure the law remains robust as we work to conserve and recover endangered and threatened species and their habitats.”

- NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator Janet Coit - [Mar. 28, 2024](#)

FEATURED PARK



Photos and facts of
your favorite parks,
one issue at a time

Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge North Carolina

FACT 1: Alligator River protects one of the few remaining populations of the critically-endangered red wolf (*Canis rufus*). Once common across the southeastern US, the species had become *extinct in the wild* by 1987, when the US Fish and Wildlife Service initiated a captive-release program. Today, red wolves remain threatened by human activity, including illegal hunting and vehicle collisions.



FACT 2: Spanning more than 150,000 acres in eastern North Carolina's Albemarle Peninsula, Alligator River protects unique *pocosin* wetland habitat. Found mostly along the eastern US's Atlantic coastal plain, the pocosin ecosystem is characterized by woody shrub vegetation and dense, sandy peat soil. The term pocosin is believed to be derived from an Eastern Algonquian word meaning “swamp-on-a-hill.”

Nominate *your* favorite local, state, or national park [here](#) so our subscribers can learn about it.

PARK PERKS



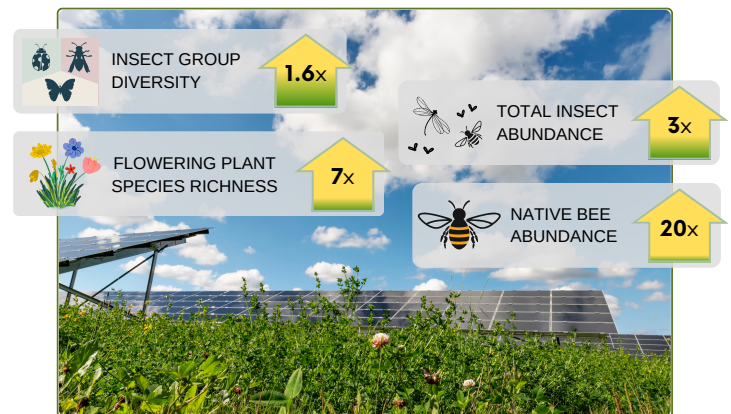
Visualizing key research to show why parks matter

Energy projects have historically degraded habitats, but what if the sector's infrastructure development could actually increase an area's conservation value? A December [article](#) published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters* explores whether utility-scale solar arrays should be targets for meadow habitat restoration. The US Department of Energy-funded study focused on former farmland that now hosts solar energy facilities, analyzing the ecological effects of grassland restoration following project construction. By recording abundance and diversity of flowering plants and insects, as well as the frequency of pollinator visits to nearby crops, the authors assessed the restoration's impact on pollinator habitat over a 5-year period.

The results indicate that grassland restoration in and around solar farms can have meaningful and rapid conservation impacts. The authors found significant increases in species diversity and abundance following restoration: flowering plant species richness was about 7 times higher after 5 years, pollinator and beneficial insect abundance was 3 times higher, and insect group diversity increased by about 160%.

Solar-pollinator Habitat

5-year impacts of grassland restoration in Minnesota solar fields



Not only did **native bee abundance increase 20-fold**, bee visitation to surrounding crops was higher than baseline activity. Since the economic benefits of this increased pollination can be significant, this research shows the conservation potential of habitat restoration projects in and around solar facilities. More broadly, it highlights the value of conservation work in unexpected places, especially areas usually written off as heavily degraded.

PLAY GROUND

Why shouldn't you aim insults at a platypus?

they can really sting

WELCOME TO THE INSTITUTE

The Park Institute proudly welcomes *William Scott Hall* to its Board of Directors. Scott brings volumes of conservation and international program experience to the organization, including over three decades with the National Park Service, US Geological Survey, Peace Corps, and Department of Interior. Scott is an alumnus of Duke University's Trinity College and what is now the Nicholas School of the Environment.