

## APPENDIX R

### MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION

The BLM Dillon Field Office will use the following considerations, conservation strategies and priority species lists to implement migratory bird conservation in southwestern Montana. Management actions should focus on providing a variety of habitat characteristics that support successful breeding by migratory birds. This generally requires providing properly functioning habitats with the appropriate vegetation diversity, density and structure based on site potential to support nesting, security and foraging. Vegetation modification actions that reduce the capability of habitats to support these needs, such as prescribed fire, timber harvest, and livestock grazing, need to be evaluated for potential adverse impacts, particularly if they occur during the spring or early summer. The timing and intensity of these actions, as well as the type of habitat and bird species present, may substantially influence the level of impact to migratory birds. Such impacts have been considered to represent “take” under FWS regulations and have management implications. BLM’s goal is to implement management during project level activities that does not adversely affect migratory bird populations.

#### BLM MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Non-game migratory birds are the primary species of concern under migratory bird conservation. Whereas waterfowl and migratory game birds are cooperatively managed by individual states and the USFWS with flyway-specific population and habitat goals and objectives, there has been less emphasis on developing and implementing management strategies to protect populations and habitat for other migratory birds, particularly neotropical migrants. These are species of songbirds, shorebirds and raptors that typically breed in North America but winter in Latin America. Because of these long-range migrations, it is important that quality habitats are adequately distributed along their migration routes to successfully reach their breeding and nesting grounds. It is also essential to provide sufficient quantities of suitable breeding habitat to maintain viable populations.

BLM’s Nongame Migratory Bird Habitat Conservation Plan (1992) provides the foundation for proactive habitat management on behalf of nongame birds that migrate to the tropics or use neotropical habitats. The overall intent is to reverse the decline in some bird populations and to implement this proactive program for other migratory species. The plan addresses goals for Inventory and Monitoring, Habitat Management, Research and Studies, Training, Education, Outreach and Communication, Domestic Partnerships, and International Partnerships. Habitat management

goals, management opportunities and recommended strategies from the plan include:

#### Goal

Restore, maintain, and enhance populations of nongame bird species through habitat management.

#### Recommended strategies

1. Prioritize breeding and migratory habitat for all nongame bird species so that management focus is on habitats of highest importance.
  - a. Prioritize the importance of each habitat type based upon bird use and total acreage present. This requires that each State possess a habitat and species inventory that will allow such ranking. The detail and resolution of the detail of the inventories will vary among States depending on what data is available. Coordination within the BLM and with its partners will be important in this process. A given habitat type may be rare on public land in one State, yet common in an adjacent state or on a nearby area. Thus specifying priorities will require not only good resource data but also good communication with other partners.
  - b. Complete a “gap analysis” to determine areas having high nongame bird habitat values that need increased management emphasis... The resolution of this analysis may be at different levels depending on the resource and management objectives, and executed at the level of the continent when identifying stopover habitats for long-distance migrants. The analysis may also be employed at the resource area level to identify needed breeding habitat ensuring a minimum, viable population of a particular species.
2. Consolidate areas under BLM administration with high nongame bird habitat values or potential.
  - a. When inventory and monitoring efforts have identified habitat with high bird values, attempt to combine such land as identified in Resource Management Plans via exchange or other suitable means. If voluntary exchange and/or acquisition is not possible, use easements Memoranda of Understanding or other methods to consolidate habitats into units of greater ecological value. This is especially important where such actions could provide landscape linkages supplying a bridge between large blocks already under management for nongame birds.
3. Restore degraded habitats to a condition consistent with nongame bird habitat objectives, emphasizing maintenance and enhancement of natural biological diversity.

- a. Promote viable nongame bird populations and natural biological diversity by implementing and/or continuing habitat restoration programs such as improved livestock management, prescribed burning, clearing of exotic vegetation, tree and shrub planting, seeding, fencing and erosion control structures.
  - b. Develop and implement management practices for riparian wetland and other areas that take into consideration impacts on nongame bird habitats. It is important for biologists and managers to pay close attention to how various management actions affect these species and their habitats. Research and experience will contribute to the future definition of “best management practices” for those species and their habitats.
4. Incorporate nongame bird management goals in resource Management Plans and activity plans as they are developed or amended.
    - a. Demonstrate that the BLM is a major player in species recovery by taking a prominent role in implementing specific recovery plans for Federally listed nongame birds that occur on public lands.
    - b. Develop and implement HMPs for all Federally listed and candidate species of nongame birds that are not covered by recovery plans.
5. Use the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to identify possible mitigation measures to avoid adverse impacts on nongame bird species and habitats.
    - a. Continue to apply the NEPA process in all management plans and decisions as a standard operating procedure. In many cases, several species will be involved and each species may have rather different behavior and biological requirements.

## OTHER CONSERVATION PLAN OBJECTIVES

In addition to the Migratory Bird Conservation Plan, several other national strategy plans for bird conservation were developed in the 1990's for shorebirds, raptors, and waterfowl. The North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) provides the primary funding source for Joint Venture projects that can now be implemented for all bird species and their habitats, based on national priorities. The objectives for all of these plans are similar:

- 1) Determine population status and trends and identify their habitats on the public lands,
- 2) Restore, maintain and enhance populations through habitat management,
- 3) Conduct research and studies to obtain knowledge needed for informed decision-making for on-the-ground management of the importance of birds and their value to our natural heritage.

- 4) Develop a broad awareness and understanding of the importance of birds and their value to our natural heritage,
- 5) Build on existing relationships and create new partnerships to foster conservation programs, and
- 6) Establish international relationships to enhance hemispheric conservation programs for migratory species.

## PRIORITY SPECIES OF CONCERN

Many of the high priority bird species identified in bird conservation plans are not currently included on BLM special status species lists. It is the intent of BLM to work with the bird conservation initiatives and the Partners in Flight prioritization process to identify where special status species recognition is warranted (see BLM Manual Supplement 6840). BLM sensitive species lists are reviewed periodically at the state level and should ensure coordination with the USFWS and Partners in Flight priority bird lists.

USFWS provides a list of Birds of Conservation Concern for specific geographic areas. The Dillon Field Office is included in the Northern Rockies Bird Conservation Region (BCR10) which recognizes the following priority species:

Swainson's hawk	Sanderling
Ferruginous hawk	Wilson's phalarope
Golden eagle	Yellow-billed cuckoo
Peregrine falcon	Flammulated owl
Prairie falcon	Black swift
Yellow rail	Lewis' woodpecker
American golden-plover	Williamson's sapsucker
Snowy plover	Red-naped sapsucker
Mountain plover	White-headed woodpecker
Solitary sandpiper	Loggerhead shrike
Upland sandpiper	Pygmy nuthatch
Whimbrel	Virginia's warbler
Long-billed curlew	Brewer's sparrow
Marbled godwit	McCown's longspur

Partners in Flight lists are developed nationally, regionally and by individual states through specific plans. The Montana Bird Conservation Plan identifies numerous priority species for grassland, shrubland, forest, riparian and wetland habitats with reasons for concern, management issues and recommendations, and population and habitat objectives. The following are considered as Priority 1 species in the MBC plan:

Common loon	Flammulated owl
Trumpeter swan	Burrowing owl
Harlequin duck	Black-backer woodpecker
Sage grouse	Olive-sided flycatcher
Piping plover	Brown creeper
Mountain plover	Sprague's pipit
Interior least tern	Baird's sparrow