Guidelines Based on Interim Findings

Technology development projects of the AWCC are meant to develop specific technical guidelines for NRCS field personnel to use with landowners in planning, establishing, and maintaining conservation practices.

Completed projects and those underway are often reinforcing or fine-tuning existing information in the NRCS technical guides by helping conservationists recommend best management practices for specific locations.

While detailed findings of individual projects of the AWCC relate to the site and specific species studied in those projects, some general conclusions can be drawn from the aggregated work.

Some of those science-based conclusions are listed below in the form of guiding principles.

Guiding principle for wetlands in the Northwest

- The value of winter-flooded farmland fields to wetland wildlife species has been known, but if those flooded wetlands can maintain connections to nearby rivers, they are valuable winter habitat for salmon and other native fish.

Guiding principle for grazing riparian areas in the West

- The same high intensity, short duration, rotational grazing systems of riparian areas that work for cattle can also provide more streamside cover, with higher input of terrestrial insect and other invertebrate prey for trout than continuous grazing.

Guiding principle for USDA grasslands establishment

- Despite the need for improved management on grass stands established by CRP and other USDA programs, these grasses are providing valuable habitat to birds and other wildlife species.

Many of the studies looked at habitat for declining grassland bird species because there is widespread concern by conservationists across the country.

Guiding principles for grasslands to support grassland-dependent birds:

- Establishing some grass in intensively farmed agricultural landscapes is better than having no grass at all.
- Wider strips are better than narrow strips for nesting success and to avoid predation.
- Block habitat is generally better than strip habitat.
- Grassland strips are most valuable as habitat if they are used as corridors to connect larger blocks of habitat.
- The structure of grasses—height variation, density, and mixture of plant types—may be more important than whether grasses used are warm- or cool-season grasses.
- While management techniques are extremely important, the success of grassland birds may be tied just as closely to the surrounding landscape as the management in any one field.
- For early successional birds, management is critical to maintain early successional habitat. Grasses that are allowed to become thick and rank lose their value as habitat.
- Fire and disking are far superior to mowing as disturbance techniques to maintain early successional habitat for quail and songbirds.