

Goal 2: Conserve and manage migratory birds with an emphasis on declining species in the North Carolina Piedmont, Sandhills, and Coastal Plain.

Migratory birds are federal trust species which we have been charged to conserve and manage. Migratory birds comprise many different guilds, have varying needs, use myriad habitat types, and are faced with an array of threats and a variety of limiting factors. For example, strategies to manage loggerhead shrikes and Wilson's plovers have very little in common yet both are migratory birds which we are charged to conserve and manage. To further complicate matters, conservation of some species is accomplished to the exclusion of others because of their contrasting needs. The Service has an entire division devoted to migratory birds. The National Wildlife Refuge System also has goals for migratory birds. Most North Carolina refuges were established for the conservation of migratory birds, namely waterfowl and other birds. It is important for Ecological Services to support the migratory bird offices, refuges, and law enforcement, in addressing the conservation needs of migratory birds.

The RFO needs to work cooperatively with these other units as well as our outside partners to take actions to benefit migratory birds, particularly those that are declining. Comprehensive plans have been developed for specific bird guilds and habitat types. Those plans include the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, and North Carolina Partners In Flight (NC-PIF) Bird Conservation Plan. There are also opportunities to collaborate on conservation strategies through the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) and NC-PIF. The NABCI is an unprecedented effort to align the conservation community and society at large in the task of conserving this continent's bird life. The NC-PIF is a cooperative effort to further bird conservation by involving government agencies, conservation organizations, private industry, the academic community, and citizens. The primary focus of NC-PIF is to coordinate and promote education, habitat conservation, and research efforts among its partners.

The NC-PIF has developed a "North Carolina Bird Species Assessment" describing bird species that are in greatest need of conservation and management in North Carolina and the habitats and geographic regions that they use (Appendix A). This guideline provides an excellent resource to help the RFO focus on those species that need attention the most by conserving and managing their habitats. The habitats that we choose to focus on first should be those that also benefit federally-listed species and for which there are insufficient resources or expertise available through other agencies and organizations to accomplish conservation. These habitats will largely be privately owned as well. Overall, the biggest threat to those declining species identified by NC-PIF is loss of habitat due to conversion and lack of management. Habitats that are most important for the RFO to focus on are longleaf pine, alluvial and non-alluvial forested wetlands, and upland hardwoods. Other important habitats to address are prairies/grasslands, mudflat/muck/impoundment, emergent wetlands, beach/dune spoil, oceans/open water, hardwood/conifer, and shrub scrub.

In 1999, the Migratory Bird Committee of the Roanoke-Tar-Neuse-Cape Fear Ecosystem Team developed specific management goals for selected migratory birds and their habitats. Currently, the Southeast Regional Director's priorities embrace migratory birds by specifically stating, "I want to continue our emphasis on partnerships that have resulted in a region-wide network of Joint Ventures focusing on delivery of bird conservation objectives." The objectives described below embrace these priorities.

Objective

Work with others each year to restore, enhance, and manage 1,000 acres of important habitat for migratory birds as identified in the North Carolina Bird Species Assessment by NC-PIF using a landscape level approach.

Performance Measures: Number of acres of wetlands and uplands achieving watershed and landscape goals through voluntary partnerships. Number of acres achieving habitat/biological community goals through voluntary agreements. Number of acres restored or enhanced to achieve habitat conditions consistent with management documents, program objectives, and consistent with substantive and procedural requirements of State and Federal water law (DOI Strategic Plan measures).

Strategy: Provide technical assistance to landowners, State partners and others.

Performance Measure:

Strategy: Provide, seek, obtain, and direct financial assistance for Landowners, State Partners and others.

Strategy: Use Safe Harbor Agreements to restore, enhance, and manage important habitat for migratory birds.

Performance Measure:

Strategy: Use Farm Bill conservation programs to restore, enhance, and manage important habitat for migratory birds.

Strategy: Use conservation partnerships to restore, enhance, and manage important habitat for migratory birds.

Objective

Work with others each year to protect from development (either permanently or long term) or assist with the protection of 1,000 acres of important habitat for migratory birds as identified in the North Carolina Bird Species Assessment by NC-PIF.

Strategy: Assist others to acquire conservation easements on key private lands.

Strategy: Develop working relationships with land trusts, the State, NRCS, and TNC, and others to cooperatively craft strategies for land protection that benefit migratory birds.

Strategy: Seek funding and support opportunities for conservation organizations to purchase lands for permanent conservation.

Objective

Prevent the destruction or degradation of 1,000 acres of habitat important for migratory birds as identified in the North Carolina Bird Species Assessment by NC-PIF each year.

Strategy: Identify projects that have the potential to significantly impact migratory birds early in the project planning process and focus evaluation on direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of projects on migratory birds.

Performance Measure: Acres of adverse impacts to priority migratory bird habitat avoided.

Strategy: Offer and negotiate alternative methods or techniques, timing, etc. that can benefit migratory birds and their habitats on all projects, permits, and plans written and reviewed.

Objective

Develop and maintain staff expertise in migratory bird ecology and management issues, and use that expertise to educate the public and others on the importance of conserving migratory birds and ways to sustain their habitats.

Strategy: Consider and address importance of migratory birds in relationship to any project or work within the office using the best available scientific information.

Strategy: Develop or use currently available promotional materials and displays on migratory birds when speaking to groups and attending outreach and education events.

Performance Measure: Percent of promotional materials reviewed, updated and shared with others annually.

Strategy: Expand involvement in migratory bird conservation efforts.