



USDA FOREST SERVICE

*Landbird
Strategic
Plan*



“The Forest Service's Landbird Conservation Program is a shining example of practicing collaborative stewardship as a way of doing business. Working hand-in-hand with public and private partners around the Nation and the world, the Forest Service is committed to being a recognized landbird conservation leader by providing habitat for sustainable resident and migrant landbird populations today and into the new millennium. This strategic document provides the flight plan on how to achieve our agency's goals to make this vision a reality.

Join us--the sky's the limit!”

Mike Dombeck, Chief

The Landbird Strategic Plan



Through the Landbird Conservation Program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture--Forest Service provides, maintains, restores, and protects habitats necessary to sustain healthy migratory and resident bird populations to achieve biological objectives, and to meet public demands for bird-related recreational opportunities. The Landbird Conservation Program is a component of the Forest Service **Natural Resource Agenda**, with focused priorities in the areas of watershed health and restoration, sustainable forest ecosystem management, forest roads, and recreation. The Landbird Conservation Program will be implemented on national forests and grasslands across the United States and will be linked to bird conservation efforts in Canada and Latin America.

The primary purpose of this strategic plan is to provide guidance for the Landbird Conservation Program and to focus efforts in a common direction. Given the geographical extent and decentralized organization of the Forest Service, such focus is necessary to stretch human and fiscal resources and to maximize program benefits. This document presents a vision for the program and six key strategy areas, along with supporting goals and actions. In large part, the success of the program can be measured in terms of its consistency with this strategic plan.

A secondary purpose of this document is to describe the direction of the Forest Service Landbird Conservation Program to partners and potential partners. It is hoped that readers of this document will see in it opportunities for individuals and groups to join forces with the Forest Service to promote the advancement of landbird conservation. ❖



Bird Migration Routes



“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it is attached to everything else in the universe.”

—John Muir

Each spring and fall the changes in our seasons are marked by massive movements of birds—migration. In the spring, more than 350 species of birds leave Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. Their destination—the 156 national forests and 20 national grasslands of the National Forest System. The 191 million acres of national forests and grasslands provide a treasure trove of habitats for birds, from subarctic tundra to tropical rainforest.

Executive Summary



Introduction

Through the Landbird Conservation Program, the Forest Service provides, maintains, restores, and protects habitats necessary to sustain healthy migratory and resident bird populations both to achieve biological objectives and to meet public demands for bird-related recreational opportunities. The program strives to be well integrated into the larger land management responsibilities of the Forest Service.

This strategic plan provides guidance for the landbird program and serves as a communication tool for the program. Forest Service landbird conservation efforts have been quite successful largely due to participation in *Partners in Flight—Aves de las Americas (PIF)*, a cooperative effort involving numerous partners working at the local, State, national, and international levels. This plan calls for expanded cooperative efforts, and focuses agency efforts on specific strategy areas, goals, and actions.

Efforts are underway to integrate the needs of other specific groups of species, such as waterfowl, shorebirds, colonial waterbirds, and various endemic and endangered species. These efforts will coalesce in the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. The Landbird Strategic Plan will provide direction for Forest Service contributions and involvement in the initiative's *PIF* component.

Strategy Areas With Supporting Goals and Actions

Future success of the Landbird Conservation Program within the Forest Service will hinge on accomplishments in six key strategy areas: Partnership Enhancement, Institutional Commitment, Organizational Effectiveness, Recreation and Economics, Research, and Monitoring. Together, these efforts bring focus to an important program within a large, decentralized agency, and position it as a model of collaborative stewardship in action.

Partnership Enhancement—Partnerships such as *PIF* are at the core of the program's success to date, and are critical to future success. Accordingly, goals and actions in this strategy area address maintenance of existing partnerships and development of new ones at local, State, regional, national, and international levels.

Institutional Commitment—Broad-based support for the program within the Forest Service is critically important. It is not enough for the “biologist community” within the Forest Service to be program supporters; line officers, land management planners, and others must share in the understanding of, and desire for, this program's success.

Organizational Effectiveness—Program efforts must be closely aligned with those spelled out in watershed analyses/restoration plans, land management plans, and *PIF* plans. Without such close coordination, well-intended efforts will not have the maximum possible impact.



Recreation and Economics—Program success is closely tied to an increased understanding of the significance that birds have in our society today. When landbird conservation efforts are described in terms of meeting recreational demand and enhancing economic activity, the program's values to society are highlighted in a new way.

Research—Science, research, and researchers play important roles in successful landbird conservation. Goals and actions center around a successful incorporation of research efforts into the program.

Monitoring—A significant monitoring component is essential for understanding the trends and conditions of landbirds and their habitats. We must ensure the quality of monitoring approaches and link them to monitoring conducted at different locations and scales.

Conclusion

The Landbird Conservation Program of the Forest Service strives to build on its success by focusing efforts in the six strategy areas described above. We encourage all who have an interest in collaborative stewardship to read the strategic plan and join in its implementation.



Introduction



Aerial acrobats—feathered flutists—mysterious migrants—birds are among the most intriguing creatures of the animal kingdom. America’s love affair with birds is currently supported by 17.7 million bird-watching enthusiasts and 54.1 million people who enjoy feeding birds and other wildlife (*USFWS, 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*). In addition to the billions of dollars of economic benefits generated by bird-related recreational activities, birds also provide critically important ecological benefits such as tree and crop insect pest consumption and seed dispersal. In many parts of the world, birds also serve both cultural and culinary functions.

In the past few years, attention has increasingly focused on the downward population trends of many bird species. Of particular concern are some neotropical migratory birds—those species that breed in North America and winter in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. These declines are most apparent for some grassland species and eastern forest-dwelling species. While reasons for declines are complex, factors believed to be responsible include habitat loss and fragmentation on both the wintering and breeding grounds, predation, cowbird parasitism, and pesticide use.

The Forest Service is working hard to help reverse these downward trends. As the agency responsible for managing the largest amount of breeding bird habitat in the United States, the Forest Service is uniquely poised to make lasting contributions to landbird conservation through habitat

protection, restoration and enhancement, research, and monitoring. Since the program’s inception in 1990, the Forest Service has been a Federal leader in *Partners in Flight—Aves de las Americas (PIF)*, an international cooperative effort aimed at conserving landbirds and their habitats by promoting conservation before species become imperiled.

The Forest Service, along with other public and private partners, is assessing the state of our Nation’s landbird resources and identifying conservation priorities for landbirds and the habitats upon which they depend. Moreover, birds are often good indicators of the integrity of ecosystems. In keeping with our stewardship responsibility for ensuring bird biodiversity, we present the following strategic plan as a blueprint for achieving our agency’s landbird conservation vision for national forests and grasslands. Please join us in working together with our conservation partners to make this vision a reality.



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Vision for the Future



Central to the mission of the agency, the Forest Service Landbird Conservation Program is a proactive, cooperative venture providing a critical link with other national and international landbird conservation efforts. The program is fully integrated with existing policy and management practices. Increased awareness and understanding of the importance of resident and migratory birds and their habitats result in land managers, conservation partners, and the general public joining together to manage national forests and grasslands in a manner promoting landbird conservation and sustaining biological diversity. National forests and grasslands are recognized as a provider of essential landbird habitat and superior birding opportunities.

Scientists and land managers achieve mutual objectives by collaborating in the design and implementation of monitoring and research activities. A well-designed monitoring program tracks and documents landbird status and population responses to watershed restoration and land management activities, thus providing the scientific data essential for successful adaptive management strategies. Biological and habitat objectives are achieved and reported at multiple scales.

The Landbird Conservation Program is seen as an integral part of the Forest Service's major strategies for sustainable forestry, ecosystem management, watershed restoration, and meeting public demand for diverse recreational opportunities. Landbird conservation objectives are well integrated into land management planning, and

impacts on landbird populations and habitats are key considerations in making land management decisions.

Finally, the program serves as a model for how government agency conservation programs will be managed. Working with a wide array of partners, from national conservation groups and other Federal and State agencies, to individual citizens, the Forest Service serves as a catalyst, bringing the resources of many interests together for the good of landbird conservation. Together, these communities (of place and interest) provide both the necessary national focus and appropriate regional and local flexibility. In this way, both participation and commitment of partners continue to grow—fueling the sustained vibrancy and quality of the program.



USDA, FS



KENTUCKY WARBLER



Partnership Enhancement



Goals:

- ❖ Domestic and international partnerships are acknowledged and recognized as a major success factor in the Landbird Conservation Program.
- ❖ New and improved partnerships are continually sought as a means of expanding and improving the Landbird Conservation Program.
- ❖ Partnerships are encouraged at all levels within the Forest Service.
- ❖ The Forest Service plays a **leadership** role in *Partners in Flight* and in fostering strong traditional and non-traditional partnerships at the State, regional, and national levels, in working across landscapes and boundaries.
- ❖ The visions and strategies of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative and other national and international bird conservation plans are incorporated into the Landbird Conservation Program.

Actions:

- ❖ Ensure active Forest Service participation in PIF State and physiographic area working groups and in the preparation and implementation of physiographic and State Bird Conservation Plans. *Regional Program Managers* (Ongoing)
- ❖ Compile a list and engage in open dialogue with key individuals in government and nongovernmental organizations involved in bird conservation planning processes to

ensure information transfer. *Regional Program Managers and National Landbird Coordinator* (Ongoing)

- ❖ Compile a partner contact list for each region and initiate discussions to explore new/expanded partnership opportunities by September 2000. *Regional Program Managers and National Landbird Coordinator*

- ❖ Develop a comprehensive list of existing national bird conservation partner memorandums of understanding (MOU's) and distribute to regions for field distribution by September 2000. *National Landbird Coordinator*

- ❖ Inform leadership teams of national partner meetings, arrange opportunities for interactions with partner organization Boards of Directors. *Regional Program Managers and National Landbird Coordinator* (Ongoing)



John Gavin, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE



NASHVILLE WARBLER



Institutional Commitment



Goals:

- ❖ Support and recognition of the Landbird Conservation Program is apparent at all levels of the Forest Service. As outcome-based performance is implemented, develop and utilize standards for achieving objectives of the Landbird Conservation Program.
- ❖ Forest Service line officers, resource specialists, and partners appreciate the Landbird Conservation Program and use this knowledge to make land management decisions and budget resource allocations.
- ❖ Landbird Conservation Program funding is at a stable level that is commensurate with delivering a high-quality program.
- ❖ Forest Service national, regional, and forest budget advice provides sufficient visibility and direction to enable the program to be successful across the country.
- ❖ The Landbird Conservation Program is consistent with *PIF* Bird Conservation Plans and is incorporated into all forest plans and ecoregional assessments.
- ❖ Work through *PIF* to underscore the importance of Forest Service involvement in landbird conservation and to identify actions/objectives best pursued by the Forest Service. *National Landbird Coordinator and Regional Program Managers* (Ongoing)
- ❖ Prepare a briefing for each Regional Forester and Station Director on the value of the Landbird Conservation Program by June 2001. *Regional Program Managers*
- ❖ Encourage incorporation of landbird interests into forest plan amendments and revisions. *Regional Program Managers* (Ongoing)
- ❖ Work with bird conservation partners to assist the Forest Service in implementing the Landbird Strategic Plan. *National Landbird Coordinator* (Immediately)
- ❖ Incorporate landbird data needs into national data base development efforts. *National Landbird Coordinator and Regional Program Managers* (Immediately)

Actions:

- ❖ Develop accomplishment targets for regions and forests for use in fiscal year 2000. *National Landbird Coordinator and Regional Program Managers*
- ❖ Identify joint recreation and wildlife projects that increase birding opportunities and protect or improve landbird habitat. Two projects per region by June 2001. *Regional Program Managers*



Bill Dyer, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER





YELLOW WARBLER



Organizational Effectiveness



Goals:

- ❖ Regional Landbird Conservation Program priorities and funding allocations are consistent with the Wildlife, Fish, and Rare Plants habitat management program, forest plans, and *PIF* Bird Conservation Plans.
- ❖ Habitat improvement efforts focus on priority habitats and habitat associations.
- ❖ Watershed restoration efforts incorporate Landbird Conservation Program objectives.
- ❖ Science, including social and political aspects, provides a key ingredient in planning, implementing, evaluating, and adjusting habitat management activities.
- ❖ Habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement activities include landbird conservation objectives and complement both *PIF* Bird Conservation Plans and priorities, and conservation objectives on adjacent lands.
- ❖ Work with regional and forest planners to incorporate landbird management—including identification of *PIF* priority birds and their habitats—into forest plans. *Regional Program Managers, Forest Biologists, and Forest Planners* (Immediately)
- ❖ Review *PIF* Bird Conservation Plans for use in developing habitat and/or population objectives for watershed restoration efforts and forest plans. *Regional Program Managers and Forest Biologists* (Immediately)
- ❖ Include landbird habitat associations in forest plans' desired future conditions, objectives, strategies, and goals. *Forest Planners, Forest Biologists, and Research Staff* (Ongoing)
- ❖ Effectively use corporate and landbird-specific Geographic Information System (GIS) data layers in all Regional Landbird Conservation Programs by FY 2001. *Regional Program Managers*

Actions:

- ❖ Identify Forest Service representatives for each *PIF* Bird Conservation Plan and support their participation in associated meetings and activities. *Regional Program Managers* (Ongoing)
- ❖ Review and document the Forest Service's primary habitat responsibility for *PIF* priority landbirds and develop a plan for reinforcing this message at all levels in the organization by June 2000. *National Landbird Coordinator and Regional Program Managers*



SHANE BRUN, CORNELL LABORATORY OF ORNITHOLOGY

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER



.....
WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER



Recreation and Economics



Goals:

- ❖ Internally and externally communicate and promote the recreation and economic benefits of bird-related activities on national forests and grasslands.
- ❖ Utilize volunteers and “citizen science” (survey/census, etc.) opportunities to meet Forest Service bird conservation needs.
- ❖ Incorporate biological and economic values of birds and bird-related recreation into land management plans and plan amendments to qualitatively capture the nonmarket values of the landbird resource.
- ❖ Highlight and strengthen the ties among the Government Performance and Results Act, the budget allocation process, and Forest Service landbird resources.
- ❖ Increase public awareness of Forest Service birding opportunities.
- ❖ Work with bird conservation partners (e.g., Cornell Lab of Ornithology, American Birding Association, Audubon) to assess data needs, establish protocols, recruit volunteers and use citizen science to collect data. *Washington Office WFRP and Research Staffs* (In progress)
- ❖ Host International Migratory Bird Day events for the public in cooperation with bird conservation partners. *Washington, Regional, Forest, and District Offices* (Ongoing)
- ❖ Incorporate meaningful measures of the Government Performance and Results Act into regional planning guides, for use in forest plans by December 2000. *Regional Wildlife and Planning Staffs*
- ❖ Utilize the American Birding Association Directory of Volunteer Birding Opportunities and Directory of Birding Festivals to publicize Forest Service opportunities for public participation in bird-related conservation efforts. *Washington, Regional, Forest, and District Offices* (Ongoing)

Actions:

- ❖ Synthesize and publish in a “popular” format the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) birding information and distribute widely by January 2001. *Washington Office and Southern Research Station*
- ❖ Develop and distribute recreation/ economic fact sheets displaying data related to recreation uses and economic values of birds by December 2000. *National Landbird Coordinator*



Photo credit: Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER



WILLOW FLYCATCHER



Research



Goals:

- ❖ Highlight the importance of national forests to landbird conservation through the collaborative work of Forest Service land managers, researchers, and landbird partners.
- ❖ Provide methodologies that enable land managers and researchers to better understand the effects of land management actions on landbird populations.
- ❖ Land managers and researchers better understand each others' needs, interests, and perspectives and incorporate them into their programs of work.
- ❖ Researchers play a lead role in monitoring design and data analysis, and a key role in program evaluation and critique.
- ❖ Effective communications and technology transfer methodologies facilitate the seamless flow of information within the Forest Service and with its partners, particularly the *PIF* Research Working Group.

Actions:

- ❖ More effectively incorporate research participation and coordination into PIF efforts, and formally designate at least one Research liaison having landbird knowledge and expertise by August 2000. *Regional Program Manager and Station Research Staffs*
- ❖ Wildlife Staff Directors and program managers participate in periodic research work unit reviews conducted by Research

and Development to seek common interests and goals and to develop a shared program between National Forest System and Research. *Wildlife Staff Directors and Station Research Staffs* (Immediately)

- ❖ Emphasize landscape-level analyses/projects that are collaboratively developed and include researchers. *Regional Program Managers and Station Research Staffs* (Ongoing)
- ❖ Initiate studies to determine and evaluate PIF priority species, to determine and evaluate PIF priority habitats, etc., and provide information for forest planning. *Washington and Station Research Staffs* (In progress)
- ❖ Monitor the effects on species and populations resulting from watershed restoration efforts and forest management activities to adjust future management using an adaptive management framework. *Washington and Station Research Staffs* (In progress)



SCARLET TANAGER



CERULEAN WARBLER



Monitoring



Goals:

- ❖ Fine-tune, re-evaluate and update existing regional landbird monitoring plans to meet current conservation needs.
- ❖ Land managers and researchers actively collaborate with statisticians in developing monitoring objectives and questions to be answered to ensure appropriate statistical validity and technical inferences.
- ❖ Develop regional landbird strategies in cooperation with Forest Service partners, particularly the *PIF Monitoring Working Group*, and incorporate regional/national monitoring protocols.
- ❖ Incorporate landbird monitoring strategies into land management plan monitoring efforts and in project evaluations.
- ❖ Monitor projects and programs at different scales to emphasize response to local actions, habitat relationships, and populations trends. *Regional Program Managers and Forest Biologists (Ongoing)*
- ❖ Participate and share in United States Geological Survey Patuxent and PIF efforts to develop centralized landbird monitoring (and other) data bases that are standardized and accessible. *Station Research Staffs (Ongoing)*
- ❖ Host a workshop in calendar year 2001 to evaluate the potential for region-wide monitoring and inventory programs. *Washington Office WFRP and Research Staffs*
- ❖ Prepare a 5-year report on landbird and habitat status/trends and program, budget and accomplishments on national forests and grasslands beginning in FY 2001. *Washington Office WFRP and Research Staffs*

Actions:

- ❖ Revise and update Regional landbird monitoring plans by December 2000. *Regional Program Managers in cooperation with Research, Statisticians, and Partners*
- ❖ Establish and make available training on landbird monitoring protocols to ensure consistency across regions by FY 2001. *Washington and Regional Program Managers in cooperation with Research Staffs*
- ❖ Ensure that landbird monitoring objectives are incorporated into all forest plan amendments and revisions. *Regional Program Managers and Forest Planners (Ongoing)*



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United States
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Agriculture



Forest
Service



Partners
In Flight