

PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES FOR UPLAND SANDPIPER AND GRASSHOPPER SPARROW MANAGEMENT IN MAINE

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March 3, 2010*

Problem : Inadequate funding reduces the efficacy of any management system particularly for species that occupy early successional habitat and require active habitat management.

Strategy 1: Although direct funding is unlikely for either of these species, some actions may be fundable in other ways. First, MDIFW should strengthen its partnership with TNC and other partners in southern Maine to continue management and monitoring efforts. Additional survey work may be conducted as part of any future bird atlas effort. For Upland Sandpiper, MDIFW should develop a working relationship with the blueberry industry to better understand blueberry cultivation and the pros and cons of various blueberry management practices.

Upland Sandpiper

Problem: We don't know specifically where the top sites for Upland Sandpiper conservation are in Maine.

Strategy 2: Use Upland Sandpiper observations in MDIFW's ETSC database to identify likely sites, then conduct follow up surveys to estimate numbers of breeding pairs, nesting success (simple, yes/no observations of young may be sufficient), etc.

Problem: It is not certain that there is adequate habitat (or habitat quality) to support a roughly 50% increase in the Upland Sandpiper population.

Strategy 3: Identify several of the top sites for breeding Upland Sandpipers (as in Strategy 2 above). Use density estimates in a habitat model to predict a range of possible statewide population levels. (Note: this could affect listing status if densities are significantly higher than currently thought to be). This strategy could also feed data to habitat objective)

Problem: We don't have a full understanding of what constitutes compatible, long-term management for Upland Sandpipers in Maine.

Upland Sandpiper and Grasshopper Sparrow Problems and Strategies

Strategy 4: Identify a suite of land management practices used on Upland Sandpiper habitat (e.g., mowing, irrigation, fertilizing) and investigate which, if any, pose limitations to survival and reproductive success.

Grasshopper Sparrow

Problem: We are poorly equipped to monitor every site where the species occurs.

Strategy 1: A strengthened partnership between MDIFW and TNC has already helped monitoring at Kennebunk Plains. Redevelopment of the Brunswick Naval Air Station will require vigilance by someone aware of the resource values of the site. The Sanford Airport, and all airports in general, will require outreach efforts in light of heightened security and awareness over recent, heavily publicized bird/aircraft strikes elsewhere in the northeast region.

Problem: Objectives for Grasshopper Sparrow may compete with those established for other early successional species, especially those requiring an increased level of shrub habitat (e.g., Black Racer, New England Cottontail).

Strategy 2: The collaborative effort between MDIFW, TNC, and others to re-examine management practices at Kennebunk Plains, as well as discuss future management options at Wells Barren appears to be addressing this problem.

Strategy 3: Ensure that public working groups (and subsequent planning documents) recognize the potentially competing needs and necessary trade offs between State-listed early successional species.

Problem: Given the apparent downward trend at Kennebunk Plains, despite management, we may not fully understand what drives habitat quality for the species, or that conditions (management history) there, may have changed.

Strategy 4: Use data from TNC burn management program together with bird point count information to test if original burn plan (frequency) still offers the best approach as measured by numbers of singing males. Incorporate this analysis into management discussions for Kennebunk Plains and potentially at Wells Barren.

Problem (as stated by Charlie Todd in 1994): Unknown elements of grasshopper sparrow biology and regional declines may impede current management efforts in Maine. Population recruitment and survival on wintering grounds are uncertainties, which currently preclude population modeling.

Upland Sandpiper and Grasshopper Sparrow Problems and Strategies

Strategy 5: Support research on grasshopper sparrow populations breeding in Maine.

Strategy 6: Coordinate studies with other researchers to monitor regional species status.

Strategy 7: The traditional rarity of grasshopper sparrows and a dramatic loss of grassland habitats in the region suggest that long-term security of the species requires an integrated approach with other northeastern states and resource managers.