



Birds

## Fox Sparrow

*Passerella iliaca*

### Priority 2 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

**Class:** Birds (*Aves*)

**Order:** Perching Birds (*Passeriformes*)

**Family:** New World Sparrows (*Passerellidae*)



### General comments:

Fox Sparrows are large, robust sparrows in the eastern Iliaca group, with rich reddish-brown plumage, bold streaking, and a thick bill. In Maine, they breed in remote, high-elevation boreal forests and shrubby coniferous habitats, especially dense stands of spruce, fir, alder, and willow above 1,000 feet. Though uncommon, they are locally abundant in areas like the west side of Baxter State Park and the Moosehead region. Primary threats include shifting habitat availability from climate change, impacts from commercial logging, and a lack of detailed knowledge about their nesting ecology and response to habitat changes.

### Species Conservation Range Maps:

Town Map: [Passerella iliaca\\_Towns.pdf](#)

Subwatershed Map: [Passerella iliaca\\_HUC12.pdf](#)

### SGCN Priority Ranking - Designation Criteria:

|                                             |                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>State Special Concern:</b>               | Fox Sparrow is listed as a species of Special Concern in Maine. |
| <b>High Regional Conservation Priority:</b> | <b>NatureServe:</b><br>Global Rank: G5 State Rank: S2           |

### Habitat Associations:

**Formation:** Boreal Wetland Forest

**Macrogroup:** North American Boreal Conifer Poor Swamp

**Habitat System:** Eastern Boreal-Sub-boreal Conifer Acidic Swamp and Treed Poor Fen

**Formation:** Northeastern Upland Forest

**Macrogroup:** Acadian-Northern Appalachian Forest

**Habitat System:** Acadian Low Elevation Spruce-Fir-Hardwood Forest

**Habitat System:** Acadian Sub-boreal Spruce Flat

**Habitat System:** Acadian-Appalachian Montane Spruce-Fir Forest

**Habitat System:** Laurentian-Acadian Sub-boreal Dry-Mesic Pine-Black Spruce-Hardwood Forest

### Threats

Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*

## Priority 2 SGCN



| Threat Priority Level based on Severity and Actionability |                            | Moderate Severity | High Severity |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
|                                                           | Highly Actionable          | Medium-High       | High          |
|                                                           | Moderately Actionable      | Medium            | Medium-High   |
|                                                           | Actionable with Difficulty | Low               | Low           |

## IUCN Level 1 Threat Biological Resource Use

## IUCN Level 2 Threat: Logging and Wood Harvesting

Severity: Moderate Severity

Actionability: Moderately Actionable

**Notes:** Intensive logging may reduce or alter the dense coniferous understory preferred by breeding birds, especially if regrowth lacks dense structure or is treated with herbicide.

## IUCN Level 1 Threat Other Options

## IUCN Level 2 Threat: Lack of knowledge

Severity: Moderate Severity

Actionability: Moderately Actionable

**Notes:** The full extent of their distribution and population trends in Maine are not well understood. Additional information needed on how they respond to different logging regimes and climate-driven habitat shifts.

## IUCN Level 1 Threat Climate Change and Severe Weather

## IUCN Level 2 Threat: Habitat Shifting or Alteration

Severity: Moderate Severity

Actionability: Actionable with Difficulty

**Notes:** Warming temperatures may alter boreal forest structure and reduce availability of cool, moist spruce-fir habitats preferred by Fox Sparrows. Peatland drying could reduce suitable breeding areas in poor conifer swamps or forested peatlands

## Species Level Conservation Actions:

None. Only species specific conservation actions that address high (red) or medium-high (orange) priority threats are summarized here.

## Conservation Actions Associated with the Shrub or Young forest birds Guild:

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| Conservation Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Category           | Biological Priority | Type     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Ecosystem effects of white-tailed deer densities should be included as one of the parameters used to set deer management goals in southern Maine. New England cottontail and other species dependent on shrubby early successional habitat would benefit from this consideration. | Species Management | moderate            | on-going |

| Conservation Action                                                                                 | Category        | Biological Priority | Type     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------|
| Improve public perception of the value of early successional habitat, especially in southern Maine. | Public Outreach | moderate            | on-going |

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Other Ecosystem Modifications

| Conservation Action                                                                                                                                       | Category           | Biological Priority | Type     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Conduct active restoration of shrubland and young forest habitat on private and public lands in areas of the state in which the habitat type is limiting. | Habitat Management | high                | on-going |

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Other Ecosystem Modifications

| Conservation Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Category        | Biological Priority | Type |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------|
| Promote forest management practices that create or maintain early successional habitat. Encourage silvicultural techniques such as patch cutting, shelterwood harvests, and variable retention to maintain a mosaic of forest age classes across the landscape, especially within large blocks of private industrial forest, land trusts, etc. Promote programs like Forestry for Maine Birds that support practices benefiting early successional birds while maintaining forest productivity. | Public Outreach | moderate            | new  |

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Other Ecosystem Modifications

| Conservation Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Category           | Biological Priority | Type |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------|
| Encourage use of native shrub species in wildlife plantings and land restoration projects. Promote the use of native shrub and early successional plantings in ecological restoration, transportation corridor management, solar farms, and utility ROWs to provide high-quality breeding and foraging habitat for shrubland birds. Avoid invasive or ornamental species that reduce habitat quality. | Habitat Management | moderate            | new  |

**Broad Taxonomic Group Conservation Actions:**

**Fox Sparrow** *Passerella iliaca*

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Additional relevant conservation actions for this species are assigned within broader taxonomic groups in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4.

**Habitat Based Conservation Actions:**

Additional conservation actions that may benefit habitat(s) associated with this species can be found in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4. Click on the Habitat Grouping of interest to launch a habitat based report summarizing relevant conservation actions and associated SGCN.

*The Wildlife Action Plan was developed through a lengthy participatory process with state agencies, targeted conservation partners, and the general public. The Plan is non-regulatory. The species, threats, and voluntary conservation actions identified in the Plan complement, but do not replace, existing work*