

# Atlantic Coast Joint Venture News

*Partners working together for the conservation of native bird species in the Atlantic Flyway region of the United States.*

October 2008

Volume 5, Number 4

## Nine North American Wetland Conservation Act Grants Approved in ACJV

On September 9, 2008, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved the first round of Fiscal Year 2009 North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants for projects in Canada and the United States including nine projects in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. Projects in Florida, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia (see map below) received over \$8 million in grant funds matched by over \$43 million from partners. More than 32,000 acres of important habitat for migratory birds will be protected or restored.

### Highlighted Projects

#### *The Great Marsh, Massachusetts*

In 2007, approximately \$1.7 million in funds were directed to NAWCA for the



*Piping Plovers can be found along the beaches adjacent to the Great Marsh. USFWS photo*

benefit of coastal Massachusetts, as a result of criminal fines paid by the Overseas Shipholding Group (OSG). In the first round of FY09, these OSG funds were allocated to two NAWCA Standard Grant projects: The Great Marsh (\$1M) and Buzzards Bay Watershed: Cornell Farm (\$700k). The Great Marsh project includes protection of more than 265 acres in fee and easement, and restoration of 33 acres of salt marsh owned by The Trustees of Reservations. This project will provide habitat for some 70 species of waterfowl, shorebirds, and waterbirds, and 90 other species of birds that use the diverse habitats included in the project.

The Great Marsh is the largest salt marsh in New England; it includes over 20,000 acres of marsh, barrier beach, tidal river, estuary, mudflat, and upland islands along Massachusetts' North Shore, from Cape Ann (Gloucester) to the Merrimack River, at the New Hampshire border. The Great Marsh, which includes the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge on Plum Island, is an internationally recognized Important Bird Area (IBA) and one of only seven sites on the U.S. East Coast formally



Atlantic Coast Joint Venture  
[www.acjv.org](http://www.acjv.org)

### Grant Proposal Deadlines:

North American Wetlands  
Conservation Act  
Standard Grants  
March 6 & July 31, 2009

North American Wetlands  
Conservation Act Small Grants  
October 29, 2008

Neotropical Migratory Bird  
Conservation Act  
November 13, 2008

National Fish and Wildlife  
Foundation  
Deadlines Vary  
Check Website

recognized by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. Recently, a group of organizations and agencies formed [The Great Marsh Coalition](#) to better coordinate stewardship of the Great Marsh through education, research, protection, restoration and management. The coalition includes Eight Towns and the Bay Committee, Essex County Greenbelt Association, Essex National Heritage Area, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation, Parker River Clean Water Association, Friends of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Ducks Unlimited, The Trustees of Reservations, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The coalition has been meeting regularly and coordinating with ACJV staff on future grant projects that will help protect or restore additional bird habitat in this outstanding ecosystem.



*Parker River National Wildlife Refuge salt marshes. USFWS photo*

### *North Florida Wetlands Conservation Project*

In 2008, the North Florida Wetlands Conservation Project was awarded \$2,000,000 in two NAWCA grants for the conservation of over 6,000 acres in Alachua County, Florida. Located in the north central Florida, this project has developed through a new regional cooperative effort that includes many partners new to the NAWCA program: the State's Florida Communities Trust, Alachua County, Alachua Conservation Trust, and seven private landowners. Other traditional partners, including The Conservation Fund, Ducks Unlimited, and Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission are also key members of the partnership.

The first two phases of this multi-phase project will protect through fee and easement acquisition, approximately 6,500 acres of ecologically unique emergent marsh prairie, lakes and hardwood hammocks in the Orange Creek/Ocklawaha Basin Focus Area of the ACJV. The karst geology includes sinkhole lakes that flood and drain periodically, creating diverse habitat conditions in an emergent marsh prairie landscape for a wide diversity of high priority bird species, including Sandhill Crane, Whooping Crane (re-established population), Mottled Duck, and Swallow-tailed Kite. Other notable species are Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Duck, Limpkin, and Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrow. This region is also home to 118 endangered or threatened plants and animals.

This partnership continues to have a vision of landscape conservation, and is currently working toward protecting additional acreage in Alachua and Marion Counties primarily emergent marsh prairie in the Levy and Ledwith Prairies and Lake Tuscawilla Connell tract. With the success of this project linking other high priority conservation areas, approximately 475,000 acres are now conserved in this diverse region of Florida.



*Levy Prairie. Photo courtesy of Alachua County Forever*



*Sandhill and Whooping Cranes. Photo courtesy of Alachua County Forever*

# Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Reintroductions within the ACE Basin of South Carolina

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is actively working towards the recovery of the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW). In 2003, the Service issued a revised RCW recovery plan in which several significant support populations were designated in South Carolina on private lands. Through habitat management and the translocation of RCW individuals, the Service is working to augment and expand existing populations and reestablish new



*Red-cockaded Woodpecker habitat in the ACE Basin. USFWS photo*

populations within its historical range. The ACE Basin is a logical choice given the quality of habitat and the level of conservation at federal, state, and private levels. The ACE Basin Project is a flagship project of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture that is recognized across North America as one of the most successful conservation efforts under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and most recently under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) through the ACJVs South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI). Currently the ACE Basin Project Area is approximately 450,000 acres in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, with over 180,000 being conserved, much of which is on private lands. Project partners are now stepping forward with the conservation of private lands to assist in the recovery of the RCW by working with the Service to establish support population(s) in the ACE Basin.

An ACE Basin population would be established on a single property or aggregate of properties within close proximity to each other that provide contiguous habitat. For each new group desired, a recruitment cluster would be established using four artificial nest cavities. Before establishing recruitment clusters and receiving translocated RCWs, landowners would enter into Safe Harbor agreements under the Endangered Species Act with a baseline number of RCWs. Funding for habitat management would be possible through various

Service cost share assistance programs. Additional funds would be possible through the sale of RCW mitigation credits where appropriate.

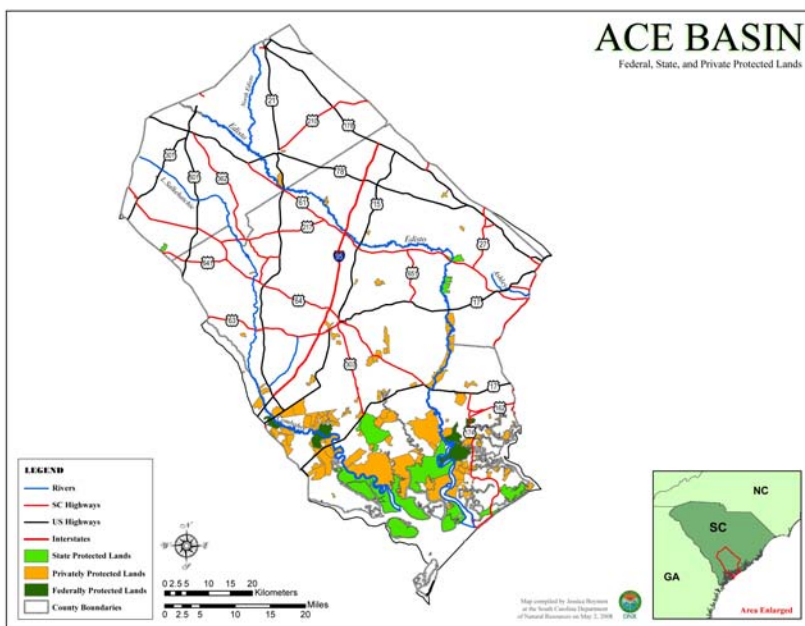
As a first step towards this initiative, Service biologists, working with



*Federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. USFWS photo*

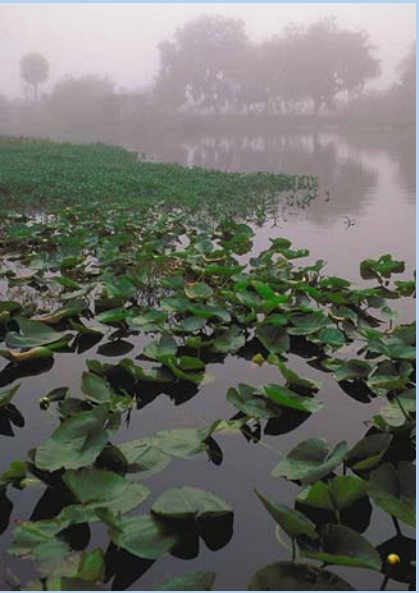


*Installing artificial nest cavity. USFWS photo*





*High priority species like the Bachman's Sparrow use the same mature pine ecosystems as RCW's. Photo courtesy of Greg Lasley Nature Photography <http://www.greglasley.net>*



*Florida wetlands. Photo courtesy of South Florida Water Management District*



*Tricolored Heron is a high priority species in Peninsular Florida Bird Conservation Region, BCR 31. Photo courtesy of Bill Majoros*

the Nemours Wildlife Foundation and Clemson University recently hosted a landowner/manager workshop at the historic Cheeha-Combahee Plantation located in the heart of the ACE Basin. At the workshop, Service and S.C. Department of Natural Resources biologists gave presentations on the natural history of RCWs, the Safe Harbor program, and the possible reintroduction of RCWs into the ACE Basin. Representatives from Milliken Forestry Company and Brosnan forests gave presentations based upon their personal experiences and perspectives of managing lands occupied with RCWs and the value of the Safe Harbor program. The workshop also included a field tour of habitat being managed in the Safe Harbor program for RCWs with open discussions of RCW related management questions and issues. The workshop was a success and several landowners/managers expressed interest in the possibility of reintroducing RCWs within their properties.

## Update on the Florida Bird Conservation Initiative: Implementing “All Bird” Conservation

In recent years, bird conservation efforts have focused on national and regional partnership-based “all bird” conservation initiatives such as Partners in Flight (PIF), and Bird Conservation Region (BCR) planning under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) and through Joint Ventures. Each of these initiatives produces landscape-scale conservation plans and strategies for native birds and establishes both population and habitat goals and objectives. All bird conservation is a high priority for Florida given the diversity of species in the state and the intrinsic value birds bring to Floridians and visitors alike. In the tradition of numerous conservation initiatives, Florida has created its own statewide all bird conservation partnership.

The Florida Bird Conservation Initiative (FBCI) was formed as a voluntary public-private partnership that seeks to promote the sustainability of native Florida birds and their habitats through coordinated efforts. With respect to Florida's native birdlife, and in concert with other local, regional, national, and international efforts, the goals of FBCI are to:

- Promote the conservation and restoration of bird populations and habitats deemed to be most vulnerable or in need of conservation attention;
- Ensure the continued sustainability of bird populations and habitats that are presently secure;
- Improve coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders to more effectively align and leverage resources in support of mutual priorities and objectives; and
- Increase awareness and support among the public and conservation community regarding issues, challenges and opportunities related to the conservation of birds.

The FBCI consists of a two-prong approach which includes a [website](#) and a statewide partnership and steering committee made up of state and federal agencies, avian non-profit organizations, and stakeholders. This new website serves as a clearinghouse of information to support avian conservation efforts by biologists, researchers, public and private land managers/owners, grant writers, policy-makers, educators, and outreach coordinators. FBCI has an active listserv with over 145 participants, which functions as a panel for discussions, a means for information exchange and, in general, improves communication among those working with birds in Florida. The statewide partnership functions to facilitate and improve communications concerning avian conservation. Within the partnership, a steering committee serves as a resource to address avian

## How Can YOU Get Involved with FBCI?

Learn more about  
Florida Bird

### Conservation Initiative!

If you would like to join the listserv, please contact the program coordinator at [Elena.Sachs@MyFWC.com](mailto:Elena.Sachs@MyFWC.com).

We also encourage you to contribute your avian projects to the statewide project database found on the “projects” page of the website. Interested in becoming a FBCI partner? Please take a moment to fill out a Memorandum of Agreement, which can be found on the “Partners” page of the website. **Join us in working together to conserve Florida’s birds!**



*Burrowing Owl. Photo courtesy of Susie Warren*



*Snail Kite. Photo courtesy of Mike Tracy*

issues and needs and to guide Florida’s overall avian conservation strategy. The idea of FBCI is to blur the lines between organizations by bringing together scientists, birders, land managers, and citizens to advance bird conservation. Additionally, major accomplishments in the past year include:

- Facilitating grant opportunities for partners and securing \$91K for partner projects;
- Developing a Bird Conservation Region (BCR) 31 species priority list (complete). [View priority bird lists for BCRs 31 and 27;](#)
- Promoting FBCI locally and regionally at conferences, working groups and relevant meetings;
- Coordinating the International Snowy Plover Breeding Survey in Florida;
- Developing a statewide avian project database; and
- Increasing Florida’s level of involvement in state, regional, and national avian initiatives.

## Focus on the (NEW!) Farm Bill in the ACJV

Two USDA agencies, [the Natural Resource Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) and the [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)](#) are among the nation’s most important federal funding mechanisms for wildlife conservation and habitat management. Together these agencies bring the Farm Bill’s conservation programs to the American public, and Farm Bill programs have grown from \$2 billion per year in 1996 to more than \$4 billion per year currently. The many different Farm Bill programs target a wide variety of wildlife species and habitats, and some were designed to strengthen existing bird habitat partnerships. Even in states where agriculture is no longer a dominant part of the landscape, there are important programs that have a major impact at the state or regional level. Though these two agencies are federal, they operate somewhat independently out of 50 different state offices and many county offices within each state. Each state gets a different funding/acreage allocation for each Farm Bill program, and each state determines its own criteria, geographic focus, and habitat/management priorities. A lot of those decisions are made through the State Technical Committee, which usually includes agricultural interests as well as a representative from the state’s fish and wildlife agency and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Many different ACJV partners are working closely with NRCS and FSA to better coordinate their conservation efforts. These collaborations are a “win-win” as partners can tap into a major source of funding, while the federal agencies get technical assistance and guidance for which species, habitats, and geographic areas are most important. Ultimately, everyone gets to help ensure that these programs have the greatest positive impact they can on natural resources, in the most appropriate and cost-effective ways. In several locations in the ACJV, partners are organizing workshops to better integrate early successional and other habitat conservation efforts at the Bird Conservation Region (BCR) scale with Farm Bill program activities.

The “2008 Farm Bill” was recently passed by Congress, and most of the current and past programs continue in the current version, though sometimes with significant changes to them. Highlighted below are some exciting opportunities for bird conservation partners to work with NRCS and FSA to integrate conservation priorities into their program activities. Promotion of at-risk species habitat conservation is a major national priority for each of the Farm Bill programs detailed below. [Link to an overview of changes in the new Farm Bill.](#)



Grassland habitat. USFWS photo



The Spadefoot Toad is a high priority species in several states that can be found with in vernal pools in grassland areas. USFWS photo



High priority species like the Henslow Sparrow use grassland habitat. Photo courtesy of Bill Howe



Late season mowing. USFWS photo

### ***Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative***

The **Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative** (CCPI) is a voluntary program established to foster conservation partnerships that focus technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds and airsheds of special significance. Under CCPI, funds are awarded to State and local governments and agencies, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations that have a history of working with agricultural producers.

### ***State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement***

Owners and operators of certain cropland in designated geographic areas may enroll eligible land in a new continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) conservation practice titled “**State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement**” or SAFE, also known as CP38. USDA approves SAFE proposals that address state and regional objectives for high-priority wildlife species. Recently SAFE programs in several ACJV states (e.g., Maine, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey) have targeted grasslands or other early-successional habitats. For example, New York’s Grassland SAFE project has a goal of enrolling 4,900 acres in CRP to benefit grassland birds. The project will provide additional benefits that include stream buffers to protect and safeguard water quality, wetland buffers to help maintain habitat integrity, water quality, and flood and drought mitigation. The goal of the Pennsylvania Seasonal Pools/Early Successional/Grass SAFE project is to enroll 5,200 acres in CRP to improve habitat for and populations of sensitive wildlife identified in the Pennsylvania State Wildlife Action Plan. This includes seasonal pool, early successional, and native grassland habitats for spring breeding amphibians, shrub nesting birds and grassland nesting birds and mammals. The acreage allocation for Maine’s grassland bird SAFE program was doubled to 2,000 acres in two large northern counties.

### ***Environmental Quality Incentives Program***

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants who install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land, with one to ten-year contracts. These contracts provide incentive payments and cost-shares to implement conservation practices. EQIP may cost-share 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices. Incentive payments may be provided for up to three years to encourage producers to carry out management practices they may not otherwise use without the incentive. However, limited resource producers and beginning farmers and ranchers may be eligible for cost-shares up to 90 percent. The **Vermont EQIP** program is designed to provide grassland habitat for declining birds in one of the highest priority regions of BCR 13, the Champlain Valley.

There are several other Farm Bill programs with great potential for bird habitat conservation. For example, the **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program** (WHIP) is the biggest NRCS program in New England states, and it supports efforts that create early-successional habitat, improve forest management, and reduce invasive species.

Other programs include the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Grassland Reserve Program, Healthy Forest Reserve Program, and Wetland Reserve Program.

**Upcoming meetings of the  
Joint Venture:**

**Winter Meetings**  
ACJV Waterfowl  
Technical Committee  
February 22, 2009  
Easton, Maryland

ACJV Nongame Bird  
Technical Committee  
February 24, 2009  
Easton, Maryland

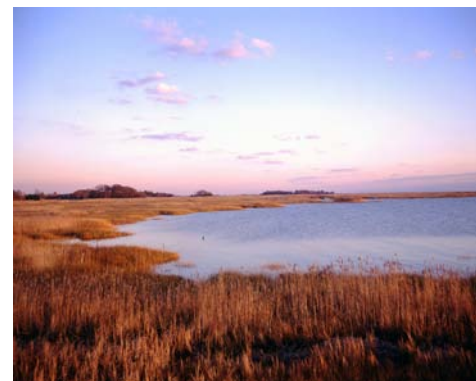
ACJV Management Board  
Summer Meeting  
March 3-4, 2009  
Virginia Beach, Virginia

## Science Funding Supports Bird Conservation Work in the ACJV

Several projects in support of bird habitat conservation in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture were recently selected to receive funding through the Science Support Partnership Program of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). This program allows the highest research priorities of the FWS to be addressed with USGS funding and staff.

### *Coastal Wetland Dynamics and Wildlife Populations: Modeling the Effects of Sea Level Rise and Landscape Change*

ACJV partners have invested considerable monetary resources into the conservation of coastal wetlands in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. Unfortunately, most of these coastal wetlands are vulnerable to additional stress and higher rates of loss due to global climate change. The Mid-Atlantic area will be extremely susceptible to both rise in sea levels and marsh subsidence, putting some of the region's most important coastal marshes at risk of being lost. Loss of these habitats is a threat to many high priority federal trust species identified by several ACJV partners (e.g., State Wildlife Action Plans and ACJV Bird Conservation Region plans).



*Coastal wetlands of the Delaware Bay.  
Photo courtesy of Michael Hogan*

It is important that the potential impacts of climate change on coastal wetlands be understood so that appropriate management plans can be developed. Furthermore, studies are needed at larger scales because conservation planning is occurring at the regional, national, and continental levels. Our ability to model expected changes in the extent and quality of coastal tidal marshes and link those results to models predicting how wildlife species will respond are crucial steps. This project will address salt marsh response to sea level rise by subdividing the entire Northeast Atlantic coast into four or five geomorphological subdivisions and modeling the response of individual intertidal wetland complexes using a state of the art computer simulation model being developed by USGS. We will then develop hierarchical spatial models to determine how wildlife species endemic to the Northeast coastal zone, such as rails, bitterns, several species of coastal sparrows, and small mammals will be affected by sea level rise (i.e., climate change) and changing land use patterns.

*Principal Investigators: Glenn Guntenspergen and Allan O'Connell, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. FWS Project Officer: Tim Jones, ACJV Science Coordinator.*

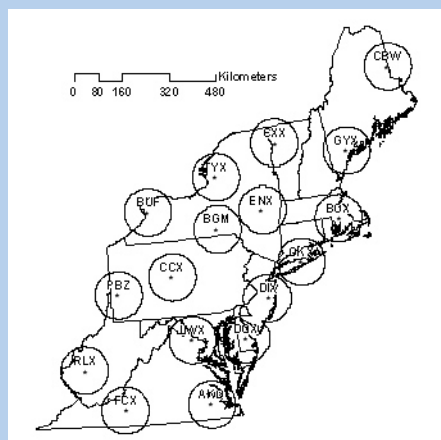
### *Radar Analysis of Fall Bird Migration Stopover Sites in the Northeastern United States*

For many bird species in the northeastern United States migration may be the period in the annual cycle when mortality is highest. This is especially true during the fall migration, when juvenile birds are making their first migratory flights. Their successful migration depends on the availability of suitable habitats where they can rest and re-fuel. The northeastern U.S. likely includes the first stopping sites for millions of southward-bound migrants. Identifying important stopover sites and habitats is thus a critical step in development of a comprehensive regional habitat conservation plan for migratory landbirds.



*Red Knots migrate through the Delaware bay and could be particularly affected by global climate change, which may be greatest at the latitudes where this species breeds and winters.*

*Photo courtesy of Harry Sell*



*Doppler weather surveillance radar units with 80 kilometer radius circles in the Northeast Region.*



Doppler radar is tracking the movements of forest interior migratory birds like the Tennessee Warbler (above); photo courtesy of Jed Hertz and coastal migrants like the Yellow-rumped Warbler (below); photo courtesy of Bill Majoros



Examples of early-successional habitat. above photo courtesy of Nathan Klaus, Georgia DNR; below, USFWS



The national network of Doppler weather surveillance radars (WSR-88D) can detect birds in the airspace as they depart daytime stopover sites to resume nocturnal migratory flight, and radar reflectivity measures are correlated to bird density aloft. By observing the relative magnitude and temporal variability of bird density during a migration season, these radars allow for a spatially-explicit assessment of the importance of migratory stopover sites across large geographic areas. This project will use data collected by the 17 WSR-88D radars in the northeast to identify and map important fall stopover sites. The large number of radars involved also will allow us to develop statistical models that predict potentially important stopover sites in portions of the region not sampled by the radars, based on geographic location, land cover, elevation, or other characteristics. Results and products from the project will help to focus conservation efforts on areas and habitats where they are likely to be most effective, contributing directly to Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Bird Conservation Region plans, State Wildlife Action Plans, Comprehensive Conservation Plans for Region 5 refuges, and to broader region-wide planning for migratory bird conservation.

*Principal Investigator: Deanna K. Dawson, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center; FWS Project Officer: Janith Taylor, USFWS Northeast Regional Refuge Biologist.*

### **Optimal Habitat Configuration for Mature-Forest and Scrub-Shrub Birds**

Declines in populations of mature-forest and scrub-shrub birds have caused concern among managers. Habitat management for mature-forest birds currently focuses on maintaining large contiguous forest blocks because studies show that both abundance and nesting success of forest-interior birds are lower in smaller habitat patches and near edges. For scrub-

shrub birds, it is recommended that large patches of disturbed (i.e., early-successional) habitat be created and maintained, because many of these species also rely on larger habitat patches and are less abundant near edges. Scrub-shrub habitat availability in the northeast is an order of magnitude less than historical levels due to disruption of natural disturbance regimes and reductions in agricultural activity and even-aged silviculture.

Managers have long assumed that promoting either mature-forest or scrub-shrub bird groups involves a direct tradeoff, i.e., managing *against* the other group. However, recent research indicates otherwise. Early-successional habitat has been shown to benefit forest-interior birds during the post-breeding period (when adults molt) and the post-fledging period, when young birds have left the nest but are still dependent on their parents. Post-fledging birds suffer high mortality, which significantly impacts population dynamics. The habitat needs of many forest-interior bird species apparently change between the nesting and post-fledging periods. Many post-breeding forest birds use scrub-shrub habitats and some appear to prefer that habitat over mature forest. Depending on scale and configuration, the positive effects of scrub-shrub habitat availability on survival rates of forest-interior birds—fledglings and



Black-throated Blue Warbler is an example of a mature forest species. Photo courtesy of Bill Majoros

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post-breeding adults—likely outweigh the relatively minor negative effects on nesting success, especially when re-nesting rates are considered.

Balancing the breeding and post-breeding habitat needs of both mature-forest and scrub-shrub birds means optimizing the amount and configuration of early- and mature-forest habitat needed. This project will develop tools that will provide management guidelines for mature-forest and scrub-shrub birds, using standard optimization procedures within forest management software. The core product will be a simple model of habitat variables that is easy for managers to understand and use, with great potential to improve habitat and populations of many priority bird species. Management alternatives will be evaluated based on the amount, patch size and interspersed of scrub-shrub habitat created under each scenario using values for edge- and area-related reductions in abundance and nesting success of mature-forest and scrub-shrub species. This evaluation will quantify and compare the trade-off between inducing edge effects on nesting mature-forest birds through timber harvest and the benefits of providing habitat for post-fledging and mature forest birds.

*Principal Investigator: Stephen DeStefano USGS Massachusetts Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit FWS Project Officer: Mitch Hartley, North Atlantic Coordinator; Atlantic Coast Joint Venture*

***Strategic Habitat Conservation for the Florida Scrub-Jay at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge***

The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge has identified a need to increase the population of Florida Scrub Jays by 100 families over the next 15 years by improving habitat conditions. Although the Refuge is actively working to restore degraded scrub, standard methods (mechanical treatment followed by prescribed fire) have failed to produce optimal conditions in some areas. This outcome is apparently due to an ecological legacy from several decades of fire suppression prior to the 1980s. This project will involve testing the habitat management techniques - short-rotation prescribed fire and creation of fire lines by plowing - using a strategic habitat management approach that will optimize efficiency by weighing benefits to scrub-jays relative to short and long-term costs.



*Florida Scrub Jay. Photo courtesy of Lynda White*

*Principal Investigator: Franklin Percival, Florida Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit; FWS Project Officer: Ron Hight, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge*

**NEW Great Bay Website**

The Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership is a group of organizations committed to protecting the important habitats of the Great Bay region, an ACJV focus area. Habitat protection strategies and stewardship activities are developed and implemented through the integration of scientific field studies and collaboration with local, regional, state and national conservation partners.

Check out the

**Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership's NEW Website!**