



Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) 24 and 25: A Framework for Ecoregional Scale Landbird Conservation Planning in Forested Avifaunal Biomes

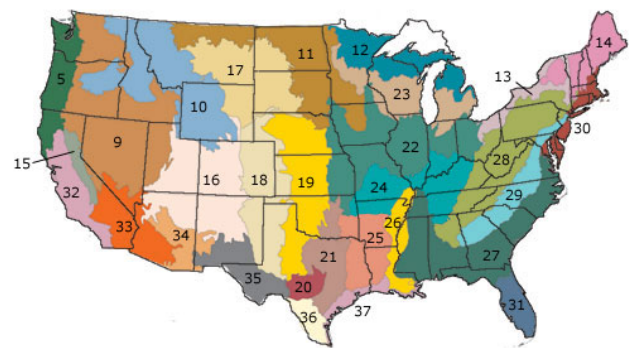
BCR Description and Priorities

Our project encompasses two predominantly forested Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs), the Central Hardwoods (BCR 24) and the West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas (BCR 25), and portions of 12 states in the central and southern U.S. (see attached map). These BCRs include a wide variety of important forest types, such as oak-hickory and native short and long-leaf pine, which provide habitat for many bird species of conservation concern, including Cerulean Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Bachman’s Sparrow, and Brown-headed Nuthatch. In this project, we focus on 41 species of landbirds, many of which have conflicting habitat requirements, that are recognized as priority species by either Partners in Flight (PIF), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs).



Conservation Design Approach

The Need. The national and international bird conservation initiatives, such as Partners in Flight and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, established population-based conservation goals and call for science-based, ecoregional partnerships to meet these goals. Likewise, strategic plans and comprehensive programmatic vision documents for the Federal Migratory Bird Program and the National Wildlife Refuge System call for the development of landscape-scale, science-based goals and objectives tied to these conservation initiatives. Furthermore, the SWAPs, which present conservation issues, priorities, and needed actions, require more quantitative and spatially explicit information to guide their implementation. In a sense, these plans and documents have created a crisis of methodology – requiring comprehensive, replicable approaches to ecoregional scale planning and assessment where none exist.



The Tools. Our project is beginning to bridge this gap by building a methodological framework that integrates National Land Cover Data (NLCD) and Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data in a manner applicable to multiple ecological regions across the forested biomes of the U.S. By combining these data, we attribute information about forest structure to land cover data in a way that allows us to predict relative density and productivity of bird populations using fine-scale habitat models across large landscapes.

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Conservation Design

The Benefits. Habitat conservation will benefit in four ways. First, our bird habitat models, based on the best available science, will allow planners to quantify current habitat availability and assess their potential to meet population objectives. Further, these models can be expanded to include other avian and non-avian species. Second, habitat condition and availability can be monitored over time because our models and their predictions can be updated as new studies are conducted and new NLCD and FIA data are generated. Third, joint ventures and individual states can examine the tradeoffs associated with species-specific conservation efforts or alternative land use scenarios (e.g., development pressure, restoration efforts, and forest management options). Finally, our methodology is readily transferable to other forested regions in the U.S., and may even be adaptable to grassland and agricultural areas, allowing a standardized approach to large-scale conservation planning.

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