



MEDIA RELEASE

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State of the Birds Report Finds Public Lands Essential for Hundreds of Species

Upcoming Federal Decisions to Have Major Effect on Bird Populations

(Washington, D.C., May 3, 2011) A coalition of groups coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and including American Bird Conservancy (ABC) today released the 2011 State of the Birds Report, which finds that public lands provide essential habitat for the survival of hundreds of bird species. More than 300 of the 800 bird species inhabiting the United States have at least 50% of their distribution on public lands and waters. These findings underscore the importance of a number of pending policy and spending decisions affecting public lands that the Obama Administration is now weighing, and which could have far-reaching effects on bird populations.

“State of the Birds 2011 reveals the benefits of conserving public lands and the importance of how these lands are managed. The Administration now has multiple opportunities to conserve bird populations by promoting bird-smart land management policies and prioritizing spending,” said Steve Holmer, Senior Policy Advisor for American Bird Conservancy. “Protecting birds and their habitats also protects recreational opportunities, clean water supplies, and many fundamental ecosystem services such as pest control and crop pollination that people often take for granted.”

“The State of the Birds Report describing the importance of public lands to our birds comes at a time of tremendous budgetary challenges and underscores the importance of maintaining support for the management of our precious public lands,” said George Wallace, Vice President of American Bird Conservancy. “For example, in the state of Hawai’i and in the U.S. Pacific island territories, some of the country’s most imperiled bird species depend almost exclusively on public lands managed by federal, state, and territorial agencies. Especially in Hawai’i, it is an ongoing challenge to ensure that management of extensive public lands is focused on the conservation of unique bird species in imminent danger of extinction.”

In addition to the funding challenge, many policy issues are also pending. The Administration must soon decide how strong the wildlife protections will be on the 193-million-acre National Forest System. The U.S.D.A. Forest Service is currently accepting public comments on a proposed forest management rule that scientists say weakens existing wildlife protections.

“We are concerned that some of the lesser-known species on the U.S. WatchList of birds of highest conservation concern may no longer be protected by forest managers,” said Holmer. The Administration is also facing a court-order to release a final Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan by June 1. The draft Recovery Plan calls for additional habitat protection for this threatened owl species. In addition, the Bureau of Land Management is currently pursuing state-by-state plans to improve management standards for the Greater Sage-Grouse, a species negatively affected by wind development, and which government scientists say is warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

“Without more of our public lands protected and a better process to address all related management issues, including grazing, we do not believe the agency will be able to effectively conserve this imperiled species,” said Holmer.

The State of the Birds Report is a collaborative project involving North American Bird Conservation Initiative, American Bird Conservancy, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Bureau of Land Management, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Department of Defense/DoD Partners in Flight, Klamath Bird Observatory, National Audubon Society, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, University of Idaho, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, and U.S. Geological Survey.

Public Lands Provide Habitat for Imperiled Species:

- 97% of the endangered Kirtland’s Warbler distribution is on public lands.
- 79% of Gunnison Sage-Grouse distribution is on public lands.
- Sage Sparrow and Le Conte’s Thrasher have more than 75% of their distributions on public lands during the breeding season.
- Almost 46% of the distribution of the California Gnatcatcher, a threatened species, is found on Department of Defense lands such as Camp Pendleton.
- Publicly owned islands support more than half of the entire global nesting populations of 16 ocean bird species.
- Among declining Hawaiian forest birds on Kaua’i, an average of 78% of their distribution is on public land owned by the state.

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American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org) conserves native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas by safeguarding the rarest species, conserving and restoring habitats, and reducing threats, while building capacity in the bird conservation movement. ABC is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit membership organization that is consistently highly rated by the independent group Charity Navigator.