

NONGAME BIRD MANAGEMENT ON THE NATIONAL FORESTS

IN THE EASTERN REGION - USDA FOREST SERVICE

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INTRODUCTION

In one respect, the Forest Service is doing much to maintain or improve nongame bird habitat through its diversity approach in vegetation management or more plainly, in coordination with timber management. We can be proud of what we accomplished with the program in diversity, such as ADP printouts showing existing and recommended vegetation composition for managers. However, the degree of refinement this program could undergo to be specific for groups of species with similar structural needs is probably years off. There is an endless array of new programs and land management opportunities to put into practice. The endless array are not nice-to-do things but need-to-do and some of these have been identified by previous speakers. It could be called a biological approach to wildlife management.

Let's take a look at what we have been doing in Region 9 to initiate a strong non-game bird management program. First of all, developing a philosophy, namely the diversity approach, and a management program to carry this forward, such as the Wildlife Composition Guides Program on the eight Lake States National Forest is a primary step. This was a significant step which occurred in the early 1970's when Wildlife Management was a small program on most forests. Beside having biological significance it was a practical program for foresters to accept and put into practice.

In an overview here is how we developed this diversity approach in coordination with timber management:

The program applies to diverse ecosystems within the Region ranging from the boreal forests of northern Minnesota to the grassland ecosystems of southern Missouri. The diversity concept is not new. It has been discussed, researched and evaluated by various ecologists and biologists for many years. The objective is species richness and the integrity of the various ecosystems.

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The National Forest Management Act of 1976 requires interdisciplinary planning, an ecological approach to management, and the maintenance of a diversity of plant communities on the National Forest. Within the Forest Service, the most efficient or practical means to accomplish habitat diversity is in coordination with timber management programs. However, the old cliché, whatever the forester does is good for wildlife management, is no longer accepted. Wildlife management goes much further as it must consider the various biological needs of groups of species or of a key species. When timber activities include a certain measure of wildlife coordination, the goals of habitat diversity can be met.

The major habitat components, which the forester has considerable influence on, are age-class distribution, and vegetative type composition.

These two variables, age and type, have a primary influence on the other habitat components, namely height of vegetation, density, shrub composition and other food, cover and nesting needs of wildlife. Using these components, the Forest biologist can have a major influence on vegetative diversity through the development of Wildlife Composition Guides.

To acquaint you with an application of habitat diversity, I will briefly describe the program on the Superior National Forest in Minnesota. The Forest is in the ecotone between the boreal forest and the Great Lakes Conifer Forest. Plant communities are fairly distinct. Aspen is a major community, especially in the pole and sawtimber categories. Other communities include paper birch, jack pine, black spruce, balsam fir, red pine and bogs. Wetlands and lakes are quite common.

In the development of the Wildlife Composition Guides, one of the first considerations was the identification and delineation of ecological units-major areas of the Forest distinctly different in habitat components. Fourteen units were identified utilizing wildlife, vegetation and soil variables. These units are very compatible with the major soil units. One of the units may be characterized as a lowland shrub-black spruce community. The water table is quite high, individual plant

communities are of low variety in height, density, and tree, shrub and herbaceous species. Commercial logging activities are limited to the predominate black spruce type. The magnolia warbler, swamp sparrow and yellowthroat are characteristic song-birds along with snowshoe hare, deer mice and redbacked voles. Most of the mammal populations are low in density and occurrence in this unit, due to the low plant variety and low soil productivity.

Another unit is the upland hardwood/conifer community with considerable variety in shrubs and herbaceous understory. Productive soils provide considerable plant diversity as evidenced by the diverse life forms. Wetlands, like the deep and shallow marsh, are found throughout this unit. An abundant wildlife population (both in species and density) is found. Moose, white-throated sparrows, black and white warblers, and timber wolves are wildlife characteristic of this community.

To implement the concept of diversity, the Wildlife Composition Guides describe type and age goals for each of the 14 physiographic units. ADP printout provide the forester with the existing and recommended composition for a given area. Information is provided for 10 vegetative communities and usually 4 age classes within each community.

A second approach to intensive non-game bird management is the support, direct or indirect, of researchers and those conducting breeding bird census of the various forest communities. The documentation of community non-game species list and specific species needs is what the Forest Wildlife biologist needs in formulating guidelines for coordination of the various resources. A good example is a snag study conducted on the Superior National Forest by Jerry Niemi, of the Lake Superior Basin Studies. We needed first-hand, pertinent biological information on the value of snags and bird species utilizing snags in clearcut areas, in northern Minnesota. Clearcutting is the silvicultural method used in regenerating many forest communities in northern Minnesota. With the biological information obtained in this study we are going to develop a snag management policy with our District Rangers and Staff.

Several Federal congressional Acts have had quite an effect on non-game management through the expansion of Forest Service wildlife programs. The budget increases may be ascribed to the direction these Acts, as the Resource Planning Act and the Sikes Act, have given in developing comprehensive

wildlife programs in coordination with the States on the National Forests.

The Sikes Act, P.L. 93-452, directed that the Forest Service develop a comprehensive fish and wildlife program in consultation with the States. To date, the Forest Service has not been funded under this act but testimony on the budget for 1980, at the Washington level, leads one to believe that these funds may be identified for Forest Service wildlife programs. The comprehensive plans have been written for 15 of the 17 National Forests in Region 9. The Resource Planning Act, (RPA) which provides for an assessment of forest resources on a national scale actively make the Forests identify their full complement of wildlife, game and non-game. Last but certainly not least, is the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) which gives basic direction to the management of the National Forests. This Act actually includes the term diversity, that diversity in plants and animals should be maintained or improved. The most outstanding recent direction for the National Forests is in the July 1978 Federal Register which provides in great detail the draft planning process for National Forest management plans. Wildlife management for all species, within the Forest Service, received an unbelievable level of coordination responsibility. Here are some examples, I quote: "A principal responsibility of the Forest Service is to manage habitats in order to maintain viable populations of all existing vertebrate species. Other guides include: the desired future condition of population trends and amount and quality of habitat shall be identified; indicator species, those which are believed to indicate effects of management activities on a number of other species, will be identified; monitoring of density levels will be initiated of selected species; and effects of proposed change in diversity will be evaluated. Certainly, this new direction in the forest planning process should bring the researcher, the manager and knowledgeable birder closer--sort of team work, if you may."

Producing information to the public on wildlife on the National Forests is also an important phase of wildlife management. We have progressed from simple lists of species present to the most recent publication "Birds of the Superior National Forest", which actually is a primer in avian ecology.

I see tremendous opportunities in non-game bird inventory and management on the National Forests in the future. The Superior National Forest is the lead Forest in Region 9 to undertake the new planning process. As a member of the interdisciplinary planning team, and along with our Regional Wildlife staff the

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the public, we intend to insure wildlife, and especially non-game species, are fully considered in the development of the management plan for the Superior National Forest.

Furthermore, our Regional Office, Washington Office and the public are all involved in developing the evaluation criteria and actual management in these Forest management plans. For all species of wildlife, it's like a new dawn for the wildlife program on the National Forests.

LITERATURE CITED

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