



Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture

2017 Year in Review

Dear AMJV Partners,

I know, I know...it's April, and I'm finally sending out our 2017 AMJV Year in Review. But, 2017 was another great year for the AMJV, and I didn't want to pass on the opportunity to celebrate the many accomplishments of our partnership. Some major highlights of 2017 include:

- Departure of Matt Cimitile, AMJV Communications Specialist, for a position with the University of South Florida as their Communications and Marketing Officer.
- Reaching the half-way point of our Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project, with 129 landowner contract enrolling almost 5,300 acres and obligating over \$3 million towards Cerulean Warbler conservation.
- The first grant slate awarded for NFWF's Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program, including 7 on which the AMJV collaborated and provided letters of support.
- And the continued efforts of all our partners in protecting and enhancing habitat for AMJV priority bird species, many of those highlighted in this Year in Review.

Once again, I want to thank our numerous partners for your tireless work and dedication to bird conservation in the Appalachians, as well as your commitment to the AMJV partnership. This year, 2018, is the 10th anniversary of the AMJV partnership, and I look forward to celebrating it with all of you with another successful year!

Todd Fearer, Coordinator, Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture

Regional Highlights

Former Management Board Chair and Vice-chair Recognized for Their Dedication to the AMJV

By Todd Fearer, AMJV Coordinator

This year, the AMJV Partnership recognized two of its founding Management Board members, David Whitehurst, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and Paul Johansen, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. Both David and Paul were instrumental in formally establishing the AMJV as a Migratory Bird Joint Venture in 2008. David then served as the Chair of the AMJV's Management Board, and Paul the Vice-chair, for 8 years until 2016. Both were outstanding leaders for the AMJV and played a critical role in developing it into the successful partnership it is today. Thanks once again to both David and Paul for your tremendous leadership over the years!



AMJV Coordinator Todd Fearer (red shirt, both photos) recognizing David Whitehurst (left) and Paul Johansen (right) for their 8 years of dedicated service to the AMJV.

AMJV Staff Helped Organize and Attended a Special Symposium at the Pathways Human Dimensions Conference

By Todd Fearer, AMJV Coordinator

Todd Fearer, Amanda Duren (AMJV Cerulean RCPP Coordinator for PA), and Kyle Aldinger (Cerulean RCPP Coordinator for WV) attended the Pathways Human Dimensions Conference in Estes Park, CO, the week of September 18th. Todd and Ashley Gramza (National Bird Conservation Social Science Coordinator) organized two complimentary sessions during the conference about the conservation behavior on private lands. The first session, titled *Conservation Behavior on Private Lands I: State of Knowledge*, focused on the latest innovative social science research relating to voluntary wildlife habitat conservation programs on private lands including investigating determinants of conservation behavior, understanding conservation behavior persistence after incentive payments end, exploring intrinsic motivations for voluntary wildlife habitat conservation behaviors, and addressing innovative tools to promote wildlife habitat conservation. The

Regional Highlights

second session, *Conservation Behavior on Private Lands II: Realities of Implementation*, focused on bridging that implementation gap, exploring how practitioners have successfully engaged landowners in voluntary conservation programs, and how these efforts have worked, or not, to instill a conservation ethic in private landowners. Kyle and Amanda presented in the second session on the challenges of managing private forests in the Appalachians, and also participated in a round-table discussion with private landowners discussing their experiences and providing insights on institutionalizing a conservation ethic on private lands. All three may have spent a little time in Rocky Mountain National Park, as well.

Halfway There: A Year of Exciting Progress in the Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project

By Amanda Duren (PA Cerulean Warbler Partnership Coordinator), Kyle Aldinger (WV Cerulean Warbler Partnership Coordinator), and Kylie Schmidt (Green Forests Work Restoration Coordinator)

The end of 2017 marked the halfway point for the implementation of the AMJV's Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project. In January 2015, the AMJV partnership received an \$8 million grant to enhance private forests as part of the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The RCPP promotes coordination between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners to deliver high-impact conservation assistance to producers and landowners. The project also utilizes an additional \$8 million in direct, in-kind, and logistical support from more than twenty AMJV partners, demonstrating the strength of our partnership model to deliver bird conservation at scale in the Appalachians. The five-year project allows partners to work with private landowners to implement active forest management to improve 12,500 acres of forest habitat and 1,000 acres of reclaimed mine lands for Cerulean Warblers and other wildlife in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Ohio, and Maryland.

The AMJV partnership is committed to promoting sustainable and science-based forest management



Kyle Aldinger (top photo) and Amanda Duren (middle photo) discuss the challenges of managing private forests in the Appalachians at the Pathways Human Dimensions Conference in Estes Park, CO. Amanda (green jacket, bottom photo), her husband, Ken (3rd from left) enjoy a day of birding in Rocky Mountain National Park with a few fellow bird enthusiasts.

Regional Highlights (continued)

practices, improving forest health and resiliency, and creating habitat for multiple bird and wildlife species. In combination with initiatives like Working Lands for Wildlife and other regional and local efforts, the Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project is a step toward achieving this vision, and creating a dynamic forest landscape in the Appalachians, consisting of a balance of forest age and size classes.

In 2017, the AMJV and our partners in each of the states involved in the RCPP grant made exciting progress toward achieving project goals, and, hopefully, in reversing the decline of this imperiled species.

Improving Forest Habitat

Pennsylvania

In 2017, our project team in Pennsylvania worked with local NRCS and PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources partners to provide technical assistance for active forest management on 2,300 acres and more than \$1.2 million dollars in financial assistance to 53 private landowners. To date, 84 contracts have been awarded in PA, offering more than \$2.1 million in financial assistance and improving habitat for Cerulean Warblers on more than 3600 acres in 24 counties.

Additionally, AMJV staff hosted a site visit with U.S. Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) on the property of a participant in a number of Farm Bill conservation programs, including the Cerulean Warbler RCPP and Working Lands For Wildlife. The visit was held in conjunction with the release of the NABCI State of the Birds Report highlighting the importance of Farm Bill conservation programs for birds. The visit allowed AMJV staff to emphasize the ecological and economic benefits of sustainable forestry to the local community. As a member of both the House Ag. Committee (Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry) and The House Natural Resources Committee, Rep. Thompson will be very involved in the development of the FY18 Farm Bill. The site visit was the latest step in what we hope will



A completed shelterwood harvest (top) and active harvest (bottom) in Centre County, PA, that were implemented as part of the AMJV's Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project (both photos by Kevin Yoder).



Congressman Glenn Thompson (right) and AMJV Coordinator Todd Fearer (left) during a site visit to a PA landowner's property (photo by Kevin Yoder).

Regional Highlights (continued)

continue to be a positive relationship between the AMJV and Rep. Thompson’s office.

West Virginia

After more than two years of extensive outreach efforts to attract potential applicants, AMJV partners and staff in West Virginia had a very successful year, more than doubling the number of landowners receiving financial assistance in 2017 compared to 2016. Twenty-three NRCS contracts were awarded to private landowners, totaling more than \$150,000 in financial assistance and impacting more than 600 acres. So far through the Cerulean Warbler RCPP, 34 West Virginia landowners have received a total of \$218,000 in financial assistance to manage more than 1100 acres to benefit cerulean warblers.

Outreach efforts continued in 2017 as well, with articles, presentations, and events aimed at educating forest landowners about sustainable forestry and attracting new applicants for the Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project. One such event was a field tour of a completed NRCS contracted project, led by the landowner and his wife. The project was a 10 acre non-commercial thinning in Putnam County. The event allowed attendees to tour the completed area and ask the landowner questions about the implementation of the

work. These types of events offer a valuable opportunity for interested landowners to see the results of recommended management practices for cerulean warblers first-hand.

Contracting efforts are currently underway for fiscal year 2018, but current projections are for at least 12 contracts to improve habitat for cerulean warblers on nearly 300 acres, and offering \$79,000 in financial assistance to West Virginia landowners.

Maryland

Our efforts with the RCPP in Maryland have seen modest success. To date, we have 5 contracts with Maryland forest landowners, obligating almost \$104,000 and enrolling 90 acres to benefit cerulean warblers.



Doug Wood, a forest landowner in WV, removing logs as part of a field demo he and his wife, Dianne Anestis, hosted to promote the AMJV Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project (photo by Dianne Anestis).

Surface Mine Reforestation

Two of the most significant threats facing Cerulean Warblers in the breeding range are the loss of mature deciduous forest and forest fragmentation. Mined land reforestation efforts can address both threats by converting grassland and shrubland areas impacted by strip-mining back into native hardwood forests. To accomplish this, unwanted vegetation removal, soil decompaction, and native tree and shrub planting are combined using a modified version of the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative’s Forestry Reclamation Approach.

Regional Accomplishments (continued)

Ohio and Kentucky are the focus of mineland restoration efforts taking place under the Cerulean Warbler RCPP. In Knox county, Kentucky, tree planting took place in spring 2017 for a 31 acre project. The project site is near lands enrolled in NRCS's Wetlands Reserve Program, and the mineland reclamation effort fits into broader efforts to create a more resilient ecosystem. In preparation for the planting, invasive species were mechanically removed and treated with an herbicide application in 2016. In Ohio, work is currently underway on four projects totaling more than 350 acres and \$377,000 in financial assistance to private landowners. Native tree and shrub plantings were conducted on each project in 2018. This includes a project in Vinton County on a property within the Cerulean Warbler focal area and adjacent to state forest land. One of the property's landowners took on the restoration as a memorial to his late sister, an environmentalist that previously owned the land. Moving forward, AMJV partner Green Forests Work has already secured a 188 acre project to be implemented in Ohio in 2019.



The checkerboard pattern made by the rips of bulldozer to decompact the soil prior to reforestation at a project site in Vinton County, OH (photo by Kylie Schmidt).

NFWF Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program Awards its First Slate of Grants

By Todd Fearer, AMJV Coordinator

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awarded \$1.7 million in grants in November to restore forest and freshwater habitat in central Appalachia, including New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, West Virginia and Virginia. The grants will generate \$1.9 million in matching



contributions for a total conservation impact of more than \$3.6 million. The grants were awarded through the [Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program](#), a partnership between NFWF, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the American Forest Foundation, and in western Pennsylvania, the Richard King Mellon Foundation. Additional funding is provided by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This is the inaugural year of the program, which invests in on-the-ground restoration and planning to restore the quality of forest and freshwater habitats in the Central Appalachian-Allegheny Plateau landscape, including the Appalachian regions of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, West Virginia and Virginia.

Ten of the selected projects, totaling over \$1.18 million in funds from NFWF and matched with over \$1.23 million from grantees, are focused on enhancing forest age and structural diversity and will benefit the suite of our AMJV priority forest birds. Todd Fearer, AMJV Coordinator, is part of the advisory team for this program. The AMJV collaborated on and provided letters of support for seven of these projects and will work NFWF and all grantees to facilitate coordination and collaboration across all 10 forestry projects to maximize

Regional Accomplishments (continued)

their collective impact across the Central Appalachia region. Six of the 10 projects are in Pennsylvania, with one also crossing into northwest New York, two are in West Virginia, and one each are located in Maryland and Ohio. Four of the awarded forestry projects are directly connected to AMJV Focal Landscapes in WV, OH, and PA/NY. The next request for proposals for the Central Appalachia Program is expected late spring or early summer of 2018.

Private Landowner Participation in NRCS Young Forest Habitat Programs

By Seth Lutter and Ashley Dayer, Virginia Tech

The Working Lands for Wildlife's Golden-winged Warbler Habitat Initiative through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the Appalachian states and a Regional Conservation Partnership Program effort in the upper Great Lakes states aim to create and restore young forest habitat on private lands. As part of an ongoing NRCS Conservation Effects Assessment Project, researchers at Virginia Tech conducted a telephone survey of private landowner participants in these NRCS young forest habitat programs. The survey assessed the social effectiveness of the programs in terms of private landowner program experiences and post-program management intentions.

Landowners had generally positive perceptions of program outcomes, high levels of trust for NRCS and agency partners, and high satisfaction with the program. Landowners were also broadly interested in continuing management for young forest after program participation, either by re-enrolling in NRCS programs or through management without further cost-share. Additionally, the survey results highlighted the constructive role of outreach from field technicians who monitored managed properties for birds. Greater detail on the survey's findings will be available in several upcoming peer-reviewed journal publications and an NRCS Conservation Insight document.



Golden-winged Warbler. Photo: Bill Hubick

New Jersey

Sparta Mountain Forest Plan Creates Educational Opportunity

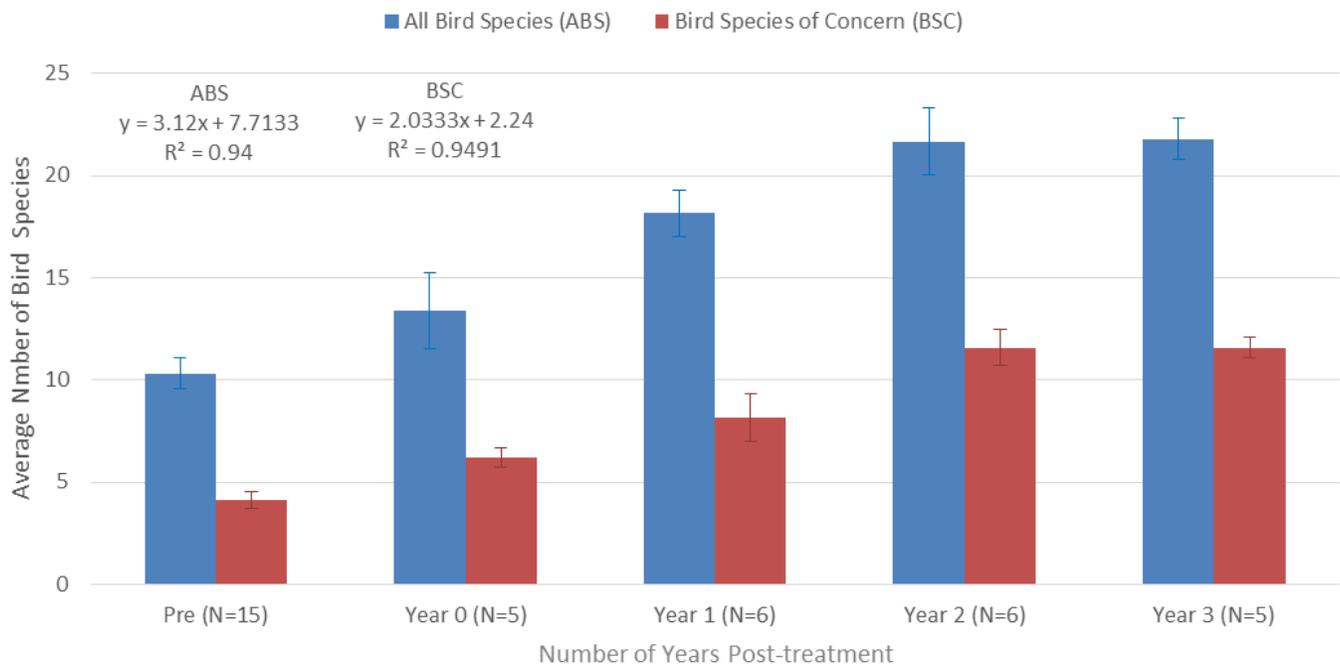
By Sharon Petzinger, NJ Fish and Wildlife, and Evan Madlinger, NJ NRCS

The proposed revision to an existing forest stewardship plan for the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area in New Jersey has been a hot topic of debate the past few years, and has even made its way into forestry discussions out west. The main goal of this 10-year plan is to balance the age classes of forest through a mixture of silvicultural treatments, such as shelterwood and modified seed tree to increase young forests, and single tree selections and group selection to enhance existing mature forests. The plan was approved in March 2018 and implementation should begin sometime in 2018.

This debate has created a unique opportunity for wildlife biologists and foresters to work together to help educate others on the need for proper forest management in NJ. In 2017, presentations and discussions have taken place in gatherings such as NJ's Woodland Stewards Program, NJ League of Municipalities, The Wildlife Society – NJ Chapter, and the state's first Charles Newlon Forestry Forum. Here is where we share the information about how well birds respond to forest management aimed at regenerating oaks and hickories (i.e.

New Jersey (continued)

Bird Survey Results on Sparta Mountain WMA



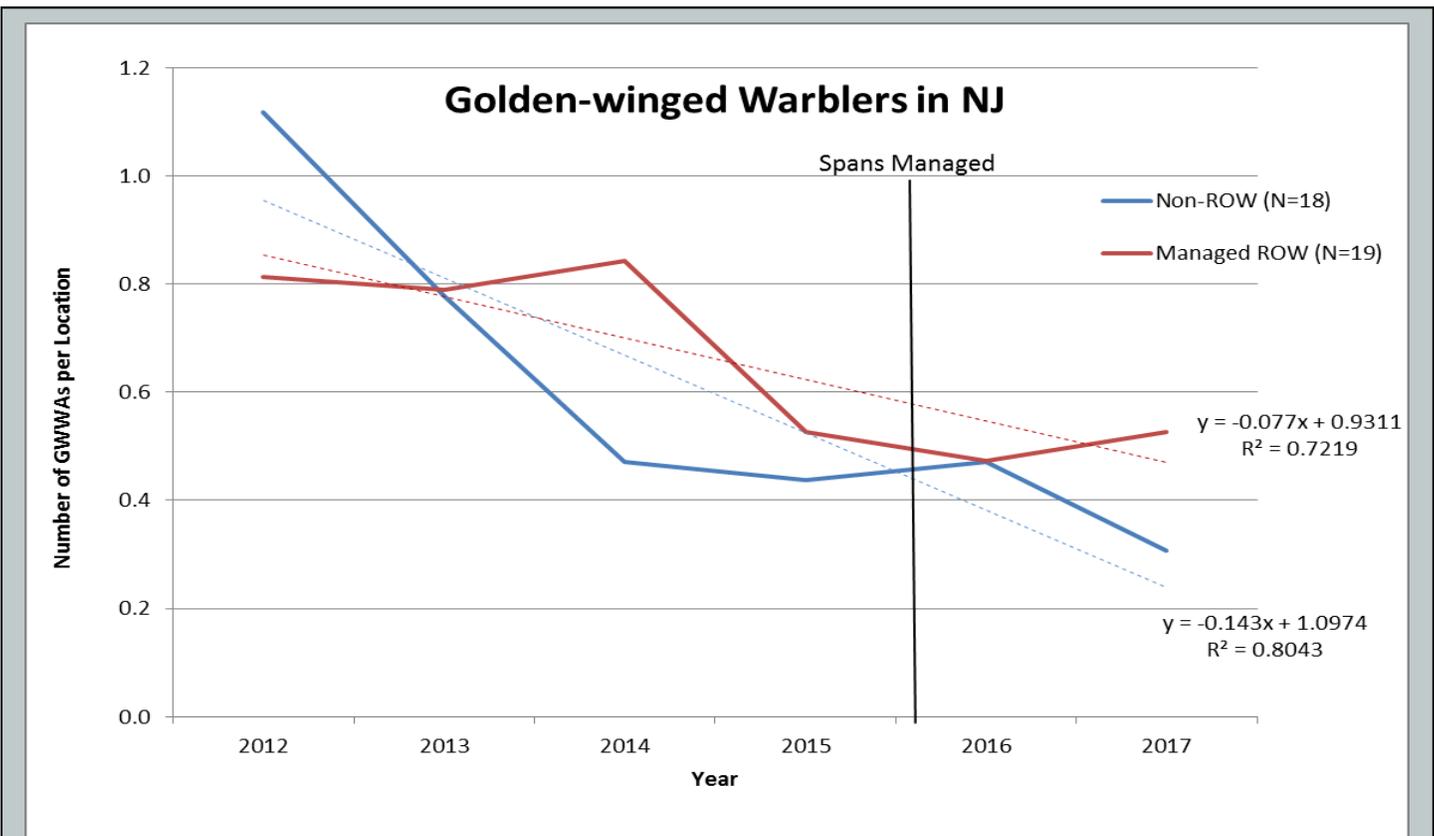
Average (\pm SE) number of bird species (ABS, blue) and bird species of concern (BSC, red) observed during breeding bird surveys on Sparta Mountain WMA. Pre-treatment surveys were conducted in 2004 and/or 2008 and selected based on proximity to treatment sites (conducted 2012-2017) within the same forest stand.

young forest).

Working Lands for Wildlife has been a huge success in NJ in 2017. Our team held two outreach events for private landowners in 2017, which resulted in about 10 applications. Furthermore, bird monitoring results showed an increase in number of bird species occupying WLFW sites in 2017, which was almost four times greater than control sites in shrubby wetlands.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about Golden-winged Warbler (GWWA) trends in NJ – they have shown a consistent decline of 6.3% per year since 2012. What’s the bright side, then? Well, over 60% of the GWWAs were found breeding on utility ROWs. Perhaps not the best place to house all your eggs, but the decline of GWWAs in NJ may have been even more drastic had the Division of Fish and Wildlife, NJ Audubon, and Public Service Electric and Gas not implemented the span-specific treatments for GWWAs in the winter of 2015/16. Recruitment and retention is higher in these spans than in the forest/shrub wetlands of northern NJ, and will slow the risk of extirpation while waiting for the WLFW and public lands sites to become suitable breeding habitat.

New Jersey (continued)



Number of golden-winged warblers observed per survey location from 2012 – 2017 (data from ENSP and NJ Audubon). The managed ROW (red) represents the 19 spans chosen for GWWA management, where the span-specific prescriptions were implemented winter of 2015/16. The Non-ROW (blue) represents known GWWA locations in 2012/13 that are not within a utility right-of-way. The dotted lines are linear trends.

New York

Audubon New York Releases New Technical Guide to Improve Forest Bird Habitat

By Mike Burger, Audubon NY

Audubon New York, the state program of the National Audubon Society, has recently released a new guide for foresters and other land managers to help improve forest bird habitat while also achieving other management objectives. *Forest Management for New York Birds: A Forester’s Guide* is a technical guide that integrates forest management planning and silviculture with habitat improvements for a full suite of forest birds.

The guide is based on a complete new assessment and synthesis of the scientific literature regarding forest bird habitat requirements and responses to forest management. It provides an overview of forest habitat requirements, as well as a framework for assessing current forest landscape and stand-level conditions. Based on existing stand conditions and landscape context, the guide helps a forester identify silvicultural options that, if implemented, will improve habitat for a suite of priority forest bird species. Desired outcomes include a balance of forest age classes and diversity of trees and other native plants in the landscape, as well as course woody debris, snags, large-diameter trees, and complex vegetative structure at the stand scale.

The habitat recommendations included in the guide are applicable to private and public lands, as well as large

New York (continued)

and small acreages. Not only will they improve habitat for birds, but they will result in a healthier, more diverse, and more resilient forest.

Kathy Moser, Deputy Commissioner of Natural Resources for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation said, “DEC was proud to work on this important guide for forest management with Audubon New York and other partners, and looks forward to its successful implementation. This guide provides a great series of recommendations on how DEC and other managers can employ active forest management on State Forests, Wildlife Management Areas and other forested areas to continue to improve habitat for wide variety of bird species and ensure the future health and resiliency of New York’s world class forests.” Available in print and online, this new publication builds upon Audubon’s research, outreach, and technical assistance efforts to improve habitat for birds in New York as well as forests throughout the eastern U.S. as part of the Healthy Forests Initiative. The Healthy Forests Initiative, part of Audubon’s national Working Lands conservation strategy, connects Audubon with foresters and forest owners to provide information and assistance to improve forest habitat for birds in need of conservation and to help create healthy forested landscapes that meet other societal needs, including carbon sequestration, watershed protection, flood control, forest products, and recreation.

“Through the Healthy Forests initiative, we’re trying to help make our working forests work for birds as well as for people,” said Mike Burger, Audubon New York’s Director of Conservation and Science. “Forests managed in accordance with this new guide will do a better job supporting our birds, and at that same time, a better job sustaining the many benefits forests provide to the people of NY, such as clean air and water, outdoor recreational opportunities, and forest-related jobs and products.”

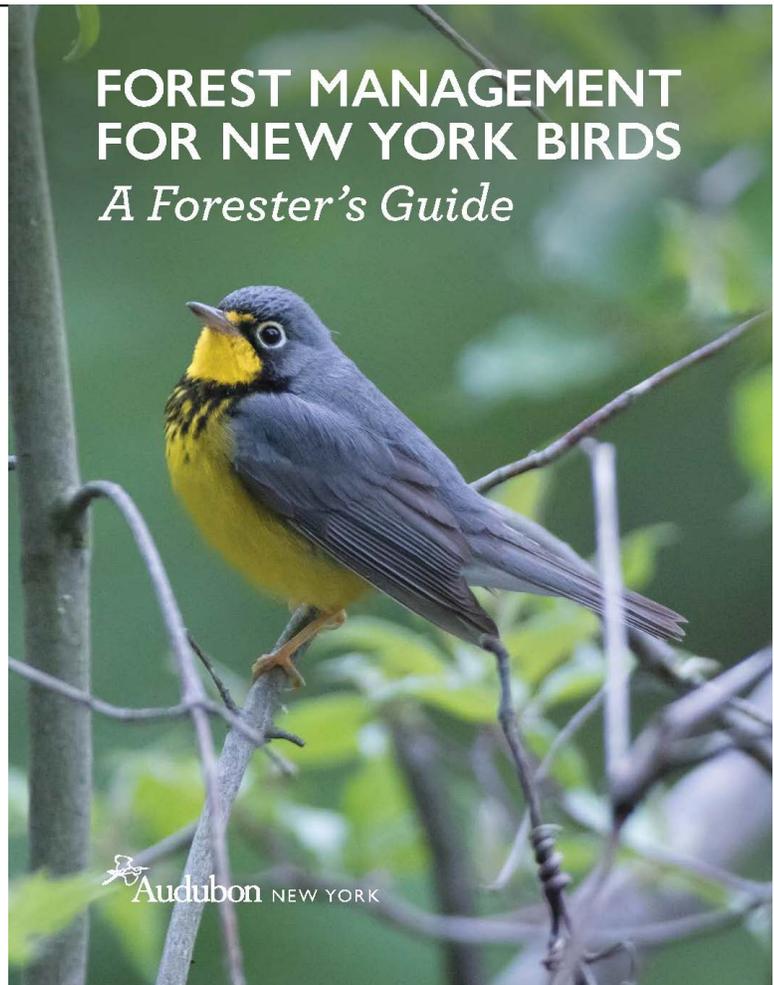
Links:

Forest Management for New York Birds: A Forester’s Guide: <http://ny.audubon.org/forestryguide>.

New York Progresses Towards Young Forest Goal on Wildlife Management Areas

By Katherine Yard, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

New York State DEC’s Young Forest Initiative (YFI) is making progress towards our goal of restoring over 10,000 acres of young forest on 91 Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) throughout the state. Our objective is to create, maintain, and improve habitat for woodcock, ruffed grouse, wild turkey, golden-winged warbler, whip-poor-will, and other young forest-dependent wildlife. Management planning continues to be our prima-



New York (continued)



Top: A sign at a noncommercial project underway at Tioughnioga WMA explains young forest habitat (photo: Adam Perry, DEC). Middle: YFI biologists observe a golden-winged warbler during a training session with Audubon NY (photo: Katherine Yard, DEC). Bottom: YFI staff conduct photo point monitoring to document vegetation response following a seed tree treatment at Rattlesnake Hill WMA (photo: Emily Bonk, DEC).

ry focus. Of the 24 WMAs located within the AMJV region, Habitat Management Plans (HMP) are complete for thirteen WMAs and five more plans are currently in progress. Each HMP includes WMA-specific forest management objectives, identifies target wildlife, and outlines an approach to create young forest on the area. Completed HMPs are available online at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7768.html>.

With planning efforts now well underway, our team of biologists and foresters has turned an eye towards implementation. YFI primarily uses even-aged forest management practices (e.g., clearcut, seed tree, and shelterwood treatments) to regenerate young forest. On WMAs in the AMJV region, we have completed 7 projects (175 acres) since the program began in 2015. An additional 26 projects (1,650 acres) are currently in progress. Of these, ten projects (450 acres) are under contract and expected to be completed within about three years. The remainder are still in the planning stage where staff are preparing prescriptions, writing contracts, and conducting pre-treatment wildlife and vegetation assessments.

Biologists completed their second field season of surveys for target species, woodland raptors, and songbirds at proposed and completed project areas. As expected, our avian point counts found indigo buntings, eastern towhees, blue-winged and chestnut-sided warblers, field sparrows, and other early successional songbirds in completed project areas. Staff documented whip-poor-wills on a 40-acre seed tree/shelterwood treatment area at Mongaup Valley WMA that was completed in 2015-16, and cerulean warblers at a 66-acre shelterwood treatment at High Tor WMA that was completed in 2015. Pre-treatment golden-winged warbler surveys at three WMAs unfortunately failed to

detect the target species. We plan to continue pre- and post-treatment monitoring next year to further evaluate wildlife response to habitat management. For more information about our program, please visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/104218.html>.

North Carolina

Restoring Red Spruce Forests in North Carolina

By Chris Kelly, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Since the inception of the Southern Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (SASRI), NCWRC Wildlife Diversity biologists have been eyeing a degraded section of high elevation forest in Haywood County for SASRI's first red spruce restoration project. The forest, situated south of the Flat Laurel Branch Trail, was impacted by logging and two severe wildfires in the early 1900s. Hardwood trees recovered faster than red spruce in burned areas, leaving today's hardwood-dominated stands. Boosting the conifer component will improve habitat for red crossbill, northern saw-whet owl, brown creeper, Carolina northern flying squirrel, and other species that use mixed boreal conifer and northern hardwood forest. Wildlife Diversity staff and partners formed the Flat Laurel Spruce Collaborative and used SASRI's Spruce Restoration Plan, a map of current spruce overstory density, and understory vegetation data collected by former Warren Wilson College student Bo Dossett to develop a prescription. Where advanced regeneration of spruce was scarce, seedlings grown by the Southern Highlands Reserve would be planted; where they were not scarce, existing seedlings and saplings would be released by girdling or cutting overtopping hardwoods.

Although this project area was a top candidate for restoration, its location approximately 1 mile from the nearest road presented a logistic challenge and, simultaneously, an opportunity for engagement with forest visitors. Over 40 volunteers from 10 organizations spent 1½ days hiking seedlings into the project site. Given the high



Top: Haywood Community College Forestry class (credit: Melissa McGaw). Bottom: Jeremy Peyton and Brandy Benz of the U.S. Forest Service use a bamboo pole to hoist bags of spruce seedlings (credit: Chris Kelly).



Left to right: Warren Wilson College student Robert Townsend plants a red spruce seedling. Warren Wilson College student Robert Townsend plants a red spruce seedling. Hermit thrush nest (all photos credit: Chris Kelly).

North Carolina (continued)

visibility of the project, volunteers talked with hikers about spruce, birds, and flying squirrels at an information booth set up in the Black Balsam parking lot. Forestry and wildlife students from Haywood Community College and Warren Wilson College then planted >900 seedlings over the course of five days. The schools are establishing long-term monitoring plots to track seedling growth and survival.

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Game Land Acquisitions

By Chris Kelly, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Over the last year, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission also focused on adding to its game land system, with the acquisition of parcels totaling 759 acres. These parcels add important habitat for vesper sparrow, yellow-bellied sapsucker, and hermit thrush on Pond Mountain Game Land; Acadian flycatcher, bald eagle, Louisiana waterthrush, ruffed grouse, Swainson's warbler, wood thrush, and yellow-throated warbler on Needmore Game Land; and Acadian flycatcher, brown creeper, common raven, veery, worm-eating warbler, and ruffed grouse on Cold Mountain Game Land.

Restoring 200 Acres for Golden-winged Warblers in North Carolina

By Curtis Smalling and Aimee Tomcho, NC Audubon

(NOTE: this story also can be found on the [NC Audubon website](#)).

Already knowledgeable advocates for good land stewardship, Ed and April Temple began looking into regional conservation priorities when they purchased their 200-acre tract in the mountains of North Carolina last year. Being in a Golden-winged Warbler focal area, they set their vision on a habitat restoration project for this imperiled bird. Much of the historically grazed and burned mountain top pastures began to grow dense with vegetation before the Temples bought the property. This overgrown vegetation limits the number of breeding territories available to the ground-nesting Golden-wing. Still, a preliminary volunteer survey of their land by (now-retired) North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission partner Patrick Farrell revealed not one



Ed and April Temple stand in front of restored Golden-winged Warbler habitat which includes a sea of native vegetation including hawthorn, little blue stem grasses, and goldenrod (photo: Aimee Tomcho).

North Carolina (continued)

but three active Golden-winged Warbler territories!

Our volunteers are an essential part of this process: after learning how to help restore habitat for Golden-winged Warblers, they are connected to landowners like the Temples, or work on their own land, to help these critically threatened birds by spreading knowledge and sharing best land management practices. Inspired by this awareness, the Temples enrolled in the Working Lands for Wildlife cost-share program to restore nearly 50 acres to early succession, and immediately began a demonstration restoration habitat on their own. While they awaited funding approval from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Working Lands for Wildlife program, the Temples began to employ some of the recommended management practices on one acre as a demonstration of what the next 50 acres would become with the work that would soon follow. By doing this, they were able to get confirmation from Audubon that the techniques they employed for vegetation thinning were appropriate.

Ultimately, with early successional habitat real estate at a premium, 50 new acres could potentially yield 10 new Golden-winged Warbler territories (and possibly 10 new nests annually!). Restoration will focus on reducing tree canopy, thinning blackberry brambles, and promoting native grasses and forbs with a focus on the Hawthorn structural component. Audubon North Carolina is happy to be partnering with the Temples as they aim high for Golden-winged Warblers!

The Sweet Smell of a Successful Forestry Project

By Curtis Smalling and Aimee Tomcho, NC Audubon

(NOTE: this story also can be found on the [NC Audubon website](#)).

In fall of 2016, Audubon North Carolina partnered with Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) to restore Golden-winged Warbler habitat in the Roan Highlands region of Western North Carolina. Golden-winged Warblers tend to be averse to conifers, meaning the six acres of remnant Christmas trees growing on a tract of land SAHC recently acquired were theoretically keeping the warblers from nesting in this area, despite its close proximity to a healthy breeding population.

Keeping conservation in mind, we didn't want to simply pile the remnant trees for useless removal (although their absence would ultimately benefit the Golden-winged Warblers): but other tree-removal attempts had so far failed to remove a substantial enough number of trees, including a seasonal "Cut-Your-Own Christmas trees" initiative.

Luckily, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy's Roan Highlands Stewardship Director Marquette



Remnant Christmas tree farm (photo: Marquette Crockett).

North Carolina (continued)

Crockett came up with a creative idea to solve the problem. Just a year and a half before Marquette's idea, Asheville-based business Blue Ridge Aromatics was started. With a modest \$5000 crowdfunding campaign, the craft oil distillery began specializing in hand-distilling essential oils of Western North Carolina plants. Like Audubon North Carolina and SAHC, Blue Ridge Aromatics favors the "Cradle to Cradle principle where 'waste' from one system serves as feedstock for another system."

With a \$1500 contribution from a larger National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, Audubon North Carolina was able to help Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy work with Blue Ridge Aromatics to harvest the remaining Fraser Firs and produce a limited edition essential oil (which sold out in record time!), opening approximately 10 total acres of high-elevation successional fields to make room for the GWWA.

Spring 2017 surveys revealed two new GWWA territories established where once there were Christmas trees! I think we can all agree this is one of the best (and earliest) gifts of all! Audubon North Carolina's \$1500 investment in this project truly paid off, establishing new Golden-winged Warbler territories, supporting a local grassroots business, and launching new partnerships and outreach opportunities. Because of its accessibility, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy is also planning to lead hikes and bird walks through the property as a "gateway" to connect people with nature.



Fraser Fir processing in preparation for distillation (photo: Ian Montgomery).

Foresters Gather for Training to Learn Bird-Friendly Techniques

By Curtis Smalling and Aimee Tomcho, NC Audubon

(NOTE: this story also can be found on the [NC Audubon website](#)).

More than forty natural resources professionals attended, representing nearly thirty different entities. The majority were state and consulting foresters, while organizations like the National Wild Turkey Federation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts were also represented. Speakers from ANC, NCFS, and NC State University presented research and methods in priority forest mapping, the history of the forests in the Southern Appalachians, and avian ecology research. Many productive conversations were initiated to further connect the mutual goal of forest health.

Tools to help landowners achieve conservation goals

The details of Forest Landbird Legacy Program, a cost-share opportunity for private landowners, were shared as a tool to effectively and economically help landowners achieve conservation priorities with sound technical recommendations that couple with financial assistance. Landowners within four NC focal areas who own 50 acres or more with stands of trees at least 50 years old qualify for this program. Because it is often professional foresters who write the forest management plans for these landowners, it is important to engage this group with a myriad of options to aid in meeting the goals families have for their land, which are more frequently including goals specific to bird diversity and abundance.

North Carolina (continued)

Foresters take to the woods!

The workshop concluded with a tour of Gill State Forest, where more than 25 plots experiment with various forms of forest management. Previous visits to the site revealed more than 50 species of birds detected thanks in part to treatments that mimicked historical disturbances to maintain a diverse vertical and horizontal vegetative structure within the stand of trees. This structure gives options to birds like the Hooded Warbler, who prefer substantial mid- and understory layers of the forest, as well as birds like the Scarlet Tanager, who prefer a large percentage of tree canopy in the overstory of forested stands.

Learning to see the forest for the trees

Monty Wooten, Registered Forester with Greenleaf Forest Management, started to look at grapevine in a different way. Whereas from a forester's perspective he sees grapevine as harmful to tree productivity, he could see its value in producing complex forest structure and as an important source of soft mast on which wildlife can forage. As we stood and looked at a huge, old maple, Michael Lewis of W. Michael Lewis & Associates pointed out how landowners can often be particularly fond of certain trees not only for their age, but for the unique characteristics that develop with time (such as natural cavities or broken limbs). Luckily, these "anomalies" are actually an important part of habitat preference in birds and serve as incredible food and cover resources for birds.

Positive feedback received after the workshop made it clear the day was a success for all involved! "Many thanks! Your class was excellent. You spoke the language of forestry, stand structure, silvics, and silviculture. You made it applicable - and that is meant as a high compliment."



Mountain Foresters for the Birds group photo (photo: Aimee Tomcho).

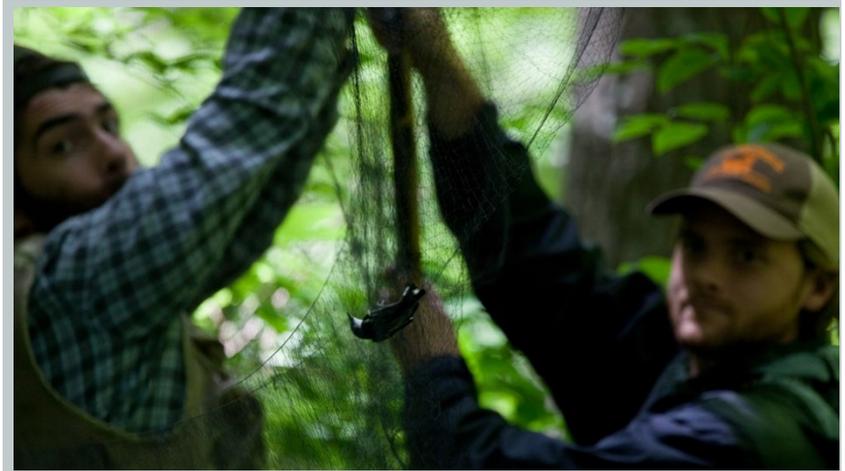
Ohio

Studying Migrations of Forest Birds in Ohio

By Laura Kearns, Ohio DNR Division of Wildlife

Supported by the Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative and Ohio Department of Natural Resources-Division of Wildlife, Doug Raybuck, a graduate student from the University of Tennessee, was able to capture and fit geolocators on 21 cerulean warblers in the spring of 2017 in Vinton and Hocking Counties in Ohio. Raybuck and crew will return in the spring of 2018 to resight and recapture the birds. Other states in the AMJV and the Midwest are also participating in the project in hopes of improving our region-wide knowledge of the migration patterns and wintering locations of the declining cerulean warbler.

In the spring of 2017, the Ohio State University also moved forward on research, supported by the ODNR-Division of Wildlife, involving eastern whip-poor-wills in the Vinton State Experimental Forest. Eastern whip-poor-wills are a nightjar species that have also experienced declines in recent years. Dr. Steve Matthews and his research crew placed GPS tags on 23 whip-poor-wills. Matthews and his crew will attempt to recapture the birds in the spring of 2018. This work follows up whip-poor-will survey work conducted in the spring of 2016, which found that automatic recording units could be useful in conducting surveys of these nocturnal species, and found trends linking increased numbers of whip-poor-wills to forests with a greater amount of early successional forest habitat.



University of Tennessee graduate student Doug Raybuck capturing Cerluean Warblers in Ohio for a regional geolocator project (photo: Nina Harfmann).

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Goshawk Project

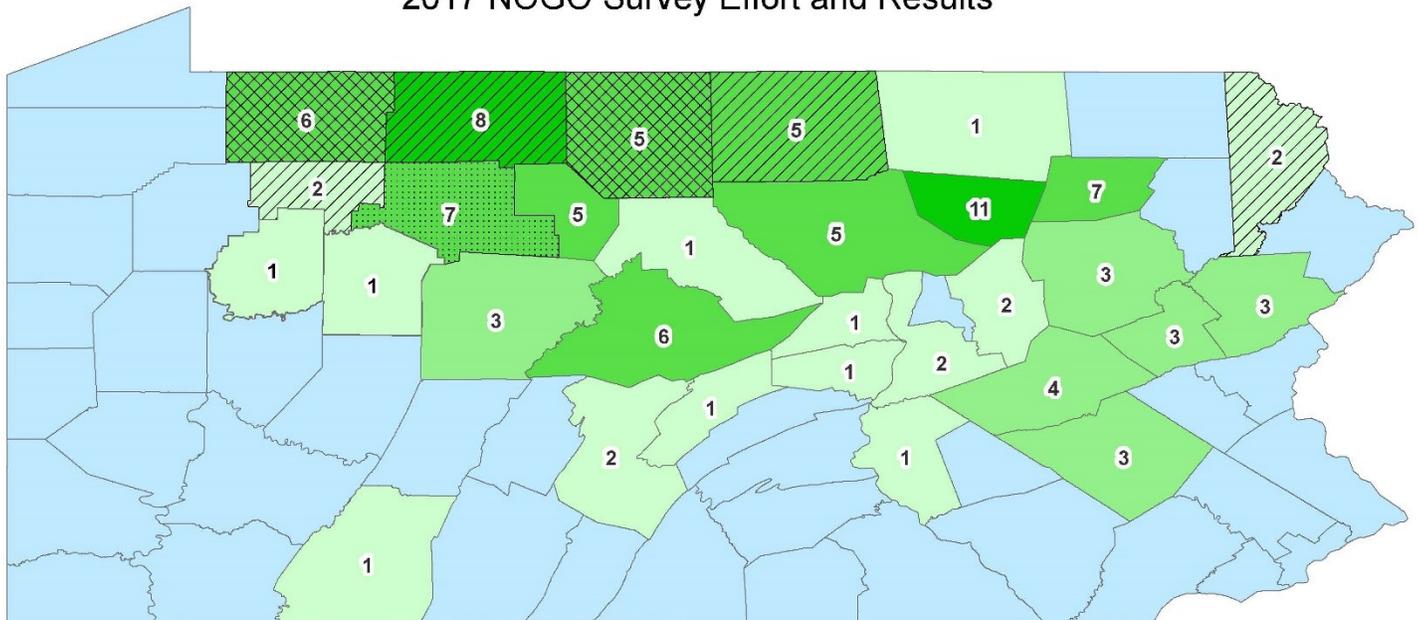
By Doug Gross, Pennsylvania Game Commission

A Pennsylvania Goshawk Project originated from the Pennsylvania Biological Survey's concern for this Near-Threatened species that seems to be in decline. Partners in the project include the Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania State University Brittingham Lab, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Allegheny National Forest, PA DCNR Bureau of Forestry, PA Society for Ornithology (PSO), PA Falconry and Hawk Trust, and the PA Falconry Association. A PSU graduate student, Chelsea Demarco, led the PA Goshawk Project field surveys and organized local searches. These complimented on-going surveys by the Central Appalachian Goshawk project led by Dave Brinker. The group worked on outreach and education to involve the public in sur-

Pennsylvania (continued)

veys and collect more data, publishing articles and news releases in several outlets including Pennsylvania Game News and birding media. In the 2017 field season, the field crew led by Demarco focused on checking historical nest territory sites gleaned from Breeding Bird Atlas data, previous thesis work, ongoing ANF research, the state agencies, and private records of cooperators. One of the objectives is to assess the current breeding range of Northern Goshawk as well as the occupation of territories. Another is to gain a better understanding of its limiting factors near the edge of its range. The most recent Atlas results suggest that not only have goshawk numbers declined but that the breeding range contracted from the south, east, and west parts of range. Not including the ANF, we were able to conduct at least one survey at 64 of 76 total historic sites (85%). No goshawks were detected in these broadcast surveys and none were found in areas like Kittatinny Ridge where they had been found previously. Although no goshawks were detected during broadcast surveys, there were a total of 84 forest raptor detections, mostly Broad-winged and Red-shouldered Hawks, including 12 active nests and 3 territories. In total, the project team found 10 active territories in this season which is a disappointing outcome. Around 352 hours were spent using the directed search method to locate nests in recently active territories. Eight nests were found between April and May by surveying historic nest sites using the directed search method. Five were found on the ANF, and 3 were provided by falconers. Outreach efforts yielded two more nests from cooperators. A map of the effort and results seems to show a continued range

2017 NOGO Survey Effort and Results



The numbers on the map represent the number of locations that were surveyed in that county this year. Some surveys were conducted in historic territories and others were conducted in areas with suitable habitat.

*All historic territories in the ANF, Berks and Schuylkill Counties were checked at least twice and those checks are not represented on this map.

Active Goshawk Territories

-  1
-  2
-  3

Surveys Conducted

-  1 - 2
-  3 - 4
-  5 - 7
-  8 - 11

Updated December 6, 2017

Map of Pennsylvania's Northern Goshawk 2017 survey efforts and detected territories.

Pennsylvania (continued)

retraction of this rare forest raptor. More surveys will be conducted in 2018 with hopes that 2017 was a particularly bad year for a species notorious for being cyclical as well as declining.

Peatland and Rare Mountain Bird Survey Projects

By Doug Gross, Pennsylvania Game Commission

The PA Game Commission continued its study of rare mountain birds and participation in a cooperative project with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) in a study of peatland birds. These surveys collected data on 3 state endangered species and at least 16 Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the last 2 field seasons. These locations were in larger forest blocks in headwater areas where evergreen conifers were a major component of the canopy. In 2017, 127 points were conducted at 15 locations adding to the 191 completed in 2016 for a total of 318 points in these remote locations in the last 2 field seasons. In 2017, four Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (Endangered) territories were found in two different peatlands, but with no evidence of nesting. A new Yellow-bellied Flycatcher territory was found in the Northwest which may be a new breeding site. Only six Blackpoll Warbler (Endangered) were found, all in either Tamarack or Coalbed Swamps, SGL 57. A new population of 5 Swainson's Thrush pairs was found along a hiking trail in Rickett's Glen State Park, but it was found that another population in SGL 13 Glass Creek woods first discovered in 1983 has apparently disappeared. Point count locations surveyed by the PGC included parts of State Game Lands (SGL) 13 and 57 and Ricketts Glen State Park in 2017 with points at the following sites: Glass Creek woods, Indefatigible Swamp, Tamarack Swamp, Crane Swamp, and Cherry Ridge Swamp. The six most frequently encountered of the 43 bird species in the 2017 PGC surveys were Ovenbird, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, Red-eyed Vireo, and Blackburnian Warbler. Eric Zawatski of Pennsylvania State University completed an undergraduate research project with Dr. Margaret Brittingham and Doug Gross on Blackpoll Warbler habitat attributes in PA where it reaches the southern extent of its breeding range. A paper on the subject was submitted to a journal for publication.



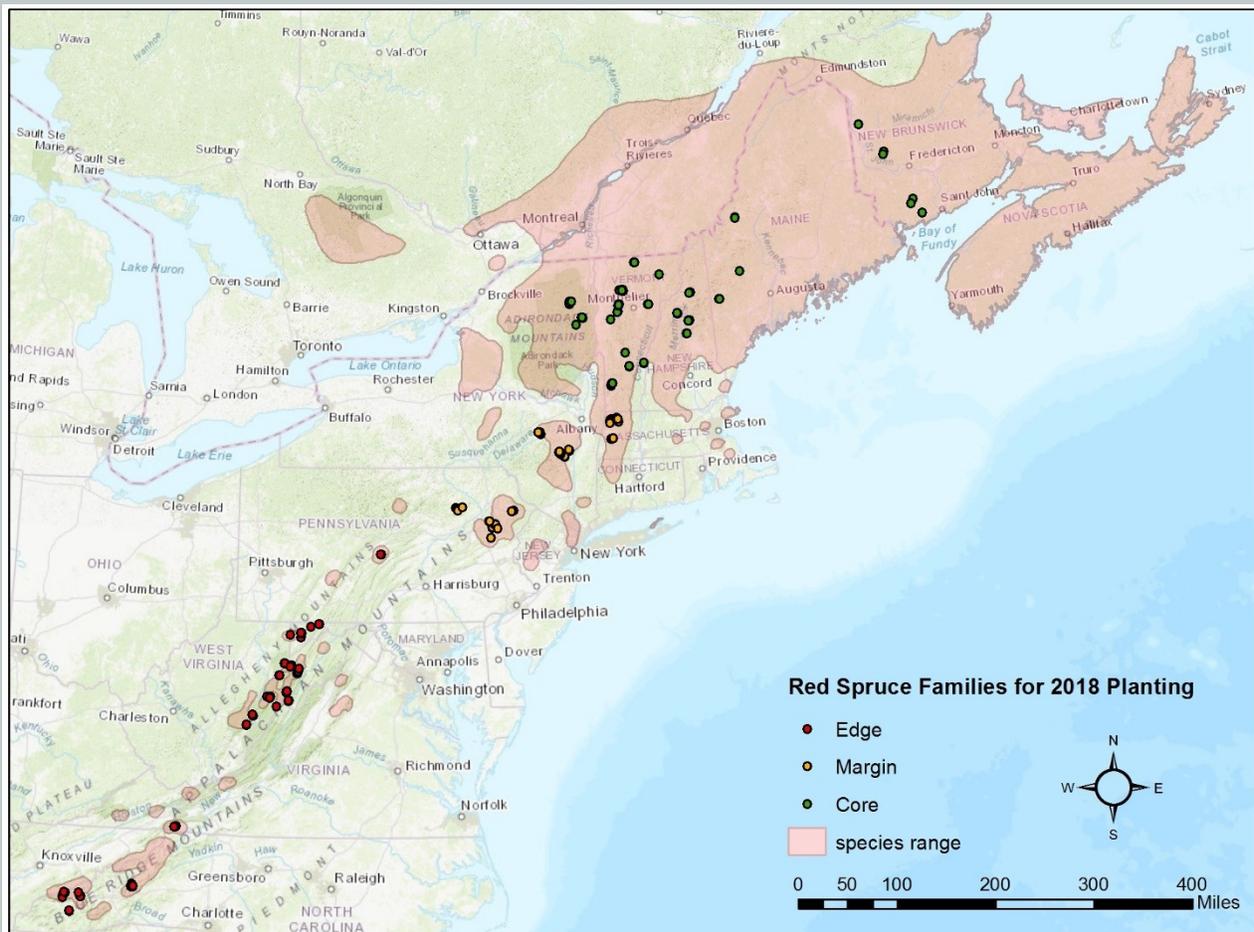
Yellow-bellied Flycatchers (top photo: Mark Johnson/Macaulay Library at Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and Blackpoll Warblers (bottom photo: Todd Deal/Macaulay Library at Cornell Lab of Ornithology), both endangered in PA, were detected during their peatland and rare bird surveys.

Pennsylvania (continued)

Red Spruce Genetics Research and Cone Seed Collection

By Doug Gross, Pennsylvania Game Commission

As part of its projects to study and conserve boreal conifer forests, the Pennsylvania Game Commission participated in a USDA Forest Service red spruce (*Picea rubens*) genetics research project and an interagency spruce seed cone collection project. The 2017 red spruce cone crop was very large, perhaps the biggest in recent years. This abundance of cones allowed us to collect genetic material and seeds for the state's nurseries at more locations than generally would be the case. Dr. John Buttnor of the Forest Service's Southern Research Station collected samples from 43 red spruce trees including eight counties. Doug Gross located trees to sample at several locations in game lands, state forests, and state parks for the collection with help of staff. The PA Department of Natural Resources collected approximately 20 bushels of red spruce cones for seeds to grow at its Penn Nursery, mostly from State Game Lands 57, Wyoming County. These yielded 11.6 pounds of dried seeds, a record haul. Seeds collected will be used for planting seedlings in areas where the agencies want to improve habitat for various boreal and conifer forest birds and mammals including Northern Flying Squirrel and Snowshoe Hare. Several bird Species of Greatest Conservation Concern are associated with conifer evergreens like spruce. Demand is high for these seeds with the increased awareness for spruce forest, a concern for the loss of hemlocks, and an increased appreciation for the potential for improving habitat of high concern conservation species. We developed a list of locations where there is easy access to red spruce for seed collection that will be useful in the future.



Map depicting the spruce genetics project by Dr. John Buttnor (USFS)

Pennsylvania (continued)

Osprey delisted in Pennsylvania

By Dan Brauning, Pennsylvania Game Commission

Osprey populations documented in Pennsylvania in 2016 met the goals and objectives stated in the Management Plan for Osprey in Pennsylvania, 2015-2025. Delisting of the osprey was undertaken in early 2017. Upon delisting, ospreys will continue to be a protected species under state statutes and will continue to be afforded protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This reflects the culmination of decades of recovery efforts and serves as a great conservation victory.

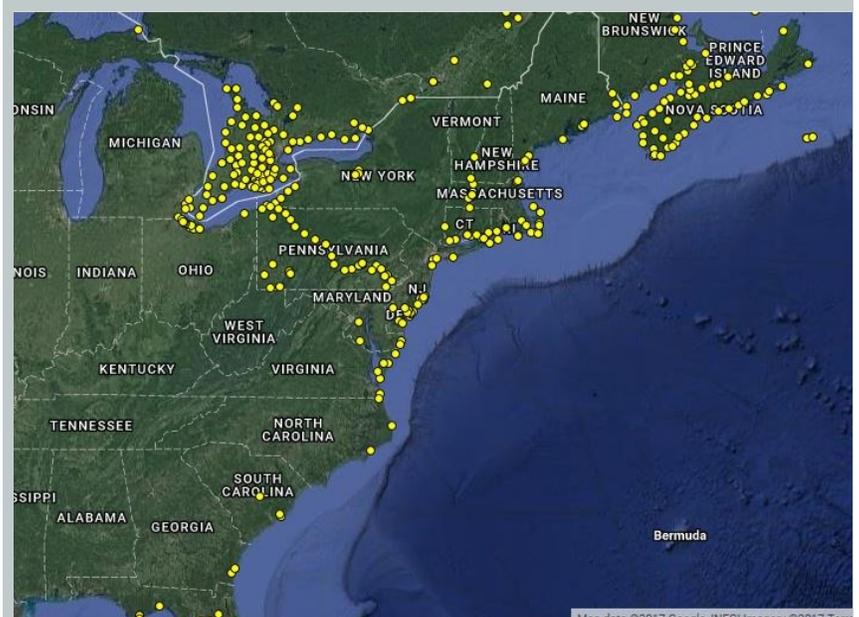


Photo: Jacob Dingel / PA Game Commission

Pennsylvania Increases its MOTUS Network

By Dan Brauning, Pennsylvania Game Commission

A coalition of partners, under the leadership of the Willistown Conservation Trust in Chester County, established a line of 20 automated MOTUS receiver stations across Pennsylvania, from near Philadelphia northeast to Lake Erie. These receiver towers close a huge gap in coverage for this network that serves a wide range of researchers using nanotags. More towers are planned in 2018.



Locations of MOTUS stations in the eastern U.S. showing the new line of stations spanning Pennsylvania.

Tennessee

Tennessee River Gorge Trust Continues Bird Banding and Geolocator Work

By Eliot Berz, Tennessee River Gorge Trust

The 2017 bird banding season has come to a close, marking yet another year of avian research conducted at the Tennessee River Gorge Trust's Bird Observatory. The Trust's avian technicians and experienced volunteers safely captured and banded 235 birds comprising 39 different species. Over 160 public visitors were also shuttled out to the Bird Observatory to experience active bird research deep in the Tennessee River Gorge. Some of the notable captures were as follows: Bay-breasted Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Canada Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and many Wood Thrush. For more information concerning bird banding at the Trust, please see <http://www.trgt.org/monitoring-banding>.

Over the summer of 2017, the Trust also completed a pilot study marking Louisiana Waterthrush (*Parkesia motacilla*) with light-level geolocator tracking devices. 16 units were deployed on birds in 2016 along with 17 control birds marked only with leg bands. The following summer, 5 geolocator-marked birds and 7 control birds returned to the Tennessee River Gorge, all in great health. With the exception of one geolocator that stopped recording data after 162 days, the other 4 units recorded data up until the recapture date. The data gleaned from the devices indicated that the geolocator-marked birds spent their winter in southern Mexico and Central America (i.e., Chiapas, Mexico; southwestern Guatemala; eastern Honduras). The birds migrated quickly and took a diverse set of routes during Spring and Fall migration (e.g., trans gulf crossings, circumnavigation of the coast). An ensuing scientific paper has been submitted for review to an ornithological journal.



Eliot Berz, Avian Research Technician at TN River Gorge Trust (TRGT; left photo), and Rick Huffines, TRGT Executive Director (center photo) work with young visitors to the TRGT. Geolocator data from five Louisiana waterthrush (right) indicate they are wintering in southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. (Photos: TRGT and Eliot Berz).

Tennessee (continued)**Cherokee National Forest Proceeds With Three Stewardship and Restoration Projects**

By Joe McGuinness, USFS Cherokee National Forest

Unaka Ranger District, Wolf Creek

Upper Wolf Creek in Cocke County, Tennessee was once home to the historic Wasp community. It is designated as a Cultural Heritage Area in the Cherokee National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan and is adjacent to the Appalachian Trail. The Cherokee National Forest Unaka Ranger District Wolf Creek Project will restore a portion of the historic landscape and create habitat for wildlife including golden-winged warblers. The project will reconstruct 87 acres of historic fields, convert old roads into trails, and provide accessible hunting/wildlife viewing. In 2016, timber was removed from the site and field conversion was initiated on 16 acres. In 2017, stumps were removed from approximately 14 acres and seeded with a native grass and forb mixture to supplement natural regeneration occurring from the seed bank. Native plant plugs were also planted to enhance habitat for pollinators and other species. Work will continue into 2018.



Stump removal work at Upper Wolf Creek, Cherokee National Forest

External partners include Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Buckmasters, and National Wild Turkey Federation.

Tellico Ranger District, Whigg Meadow

The Cherokee National Forest Tellico Ranger District began implementation of the Whigg Meadow high elevation restoration project in 2014, and work on the project continued in 2017. Grassy balds and high elevation meadows play an important role in supporting biodiversity. The grassy bald at Whigg Meadow (5000 feet elevation) approximates a community classified by the National Plant Community Classification as a *Danthonia compressa* –(*Sibbaldiopsis tridentata*) herbaceous vegetation grassy bald (Southern grass type). The true bald community is ranked as G1-Critically imperiled. These vital resources are rapidly declining range-wide due to woody plant invasion and will require active recovery and long-term management if they are to survive. The protection and enhancement of this resource conserves the unique plant and animal communities, protecting and preserving populations of rare species and contributing towards the restoration of high elevation early successional game and nongame species including golden winged warbler.

The project also aims to improve habitat conditions for the Carolina northern flying squirrel, a federally listed species present in the area, and will contribute toward enhancing significant visual resources for recreationists. Before the project began only about 6 acres of actual grassy opening remained. In addition, the *Vaccinium*

Tennessee (continued)



Whigg Meadow is a frequently visited and highly visible area for the public with a permanent bird banding station that has been operating for 18 years.

species once so prevalent and such a draw for berry pickers were declining. Small diameter stems (<6 inches dbh) have been cut creating small openings around the existing opening. Much of the overstory remains and protects beech gaps and moist areas. In the more xeric transitional vegetation around the meadow, habitat for golden-winged warbler and associated high elevational species has been improved. Herbicide has been applied to the cut stumps and prescribed burning will follow. Other activities will open up still more of the early successional area and hopefully enhance berry production.

Whigg Meadow is a frequently visited and highly visible area for the public. It is on the Benton Mackaye trail system and is just off the Chero-

hala Skyway which runs from Tellico Plains, TN to Robbinsville, NC. Many people use the area for sightseeing, berry picking and camping. In addition, it is a permanent migratory bird banding station where work has been ongoing in the fall for the last 18 years. Volunteers who run the banding station as well as US Fish and Wildlife Service, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the University of Tennessee and other colleges and universities have provided expertise and research on the project.



Habitat improvement work at Whigg Meadow to maintain and enhance the bald and early successional communities.

Ocoee Ranger District, Hogback

The Cherokee National Forest Ocoee Ranger District began implementation of the Hogback Mountain Stewardship project in 2010, and work continued in 2017. The project goal is to enhance elements of Southern Ap-

Tennessee (continued)

Appalachian early successional habitat including mast production and other forage, seclusion and young rearing for black bear, wild turkey and a host of many other game and non-game species. The project area is also located within a state-designated black bear reserve, and habitat improvements benefit this and other game and non-game species. Hunter success and satisfaction is also expected to improve.

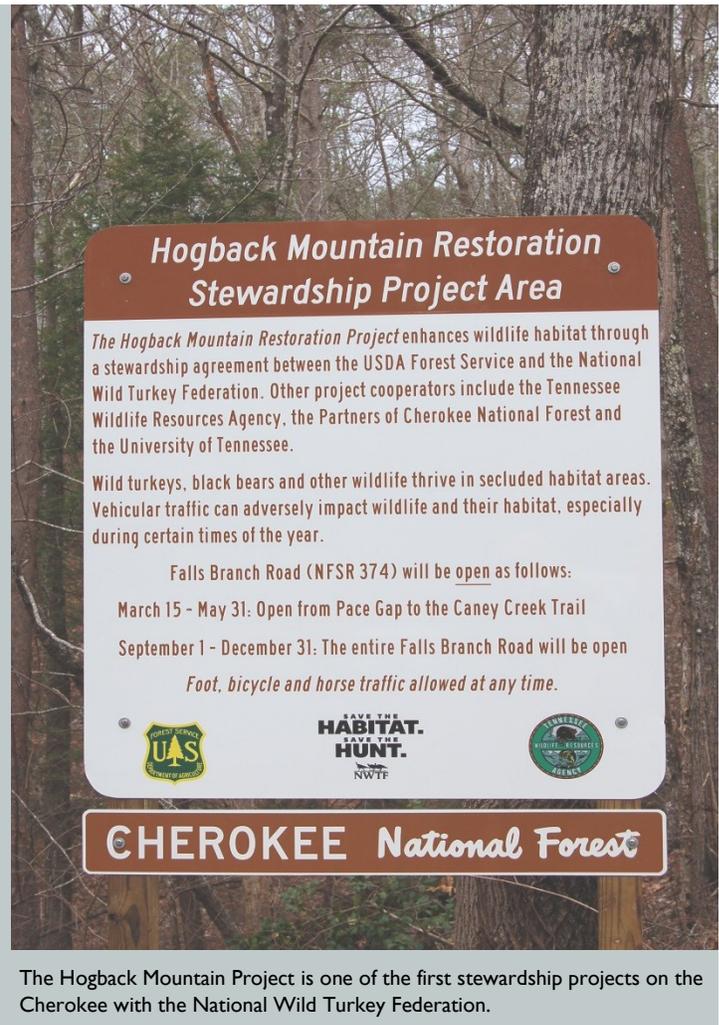
This is one of the first stewardship projects with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) to be implemented in the Cherokee National Forest. This project is ongoing and has had many modifications and additions, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the groups involved.

The project includes:

- Creating approximately 470 acres of oak woodland
- Restoring natural communities and improving forest health through silvicultural regeneration treatments on approximately 40 acres
- Restoring forest health, tree vigor, and wildlife browse by diversifying stand age classes through silvicultural treatments on approximately 23 acres
- Restricting public access by seasonal closure of approximately 3.5 miles of open road going through the habitat improvements.

The nearest communities include Cleveland, Benton, and Ducktown in Tennessee and McKaysville in Georgia. Cleveland is approximately 17 miles northwest of the project area. Ducktown is the nearest small community, which is approximately 7 miles east of the project area. The area has been highlighted as a showcase of collaboration and habitat restoration during many field trips. It is in a location popular with sportsmen and within the Cherokee Wildlife Management Area. The district worked closely with TWRA throughout all aspects of the project. In addition, signage has been placed describing the work and the benefits to the natural resources.

In addition, other user groups including the Partners of the Cherokee National Forest, The University of Tennessee's Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, The Tennessee Exotic Pest Plant Council, Southern Environmental Law Center (on behalf of Cherokee Forest Voices, Wild South, American Hiking Society, and Chattanooga Hiking Club), the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, Wildlaw, and The Tennessee Ornithological Society were involved in discussions about the project. Other informal discussions among hunter groups have taken place over the years.



Tennessee (continued)

324 Acres on TN Slopes of Hump Mountain – Now Protected!

By Cate Jaffe and Marquette Crockett, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

On May 19, 2017, the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) purchased 324 acres in the Highlands of Roan — permanently protecting the northern slopes of Hump Mountain just 500 ft. from the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT). The property, adjoining Cherokee National Forest and Hampton Creek Cove State Natural Area, has been a conservation priority for SAHC and our partners at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and the US Forest Service for decades.



A view of SAHC's Hump Mountain property from the Appalachian Trail. The property is prominent in the view along a mile stretch of the AT (SAHC).

“Our purchasing this tract ensures that future generations of hikers will be able to enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the AT on Hump Mountain,” said SAHC Executive Director Carl Silverstein. “This property has been one of our top conservation priorities since the founding of our organization, and we are deeply proud of having worked with the landowners and our partners to acquire it.”

Critical Habitat Conserved

Surrounded on three sides by federal and state protected lands, the Hump Mountain tract forms a critical bridge between the Cherokee National Forest and the Hampton Creek Cove State Natural Area. The property also lies within the federally significant Roan Mountain Massif Natural Area

and Audubon Society's globally significant Roan Mountain Important Bird Area. The Audubon Society reports over 188 bird species in the Roan Mountain IBA, 31 of which are high priority species.

This high elevation tract (rising to about 5,000 feet) contains exceptional habitat and water resources for a multitude of species. Approximately 6,400 feet of high order streams run through the property, including the headwaters of Shell Creek and Doll Branch, which flow into the Doe River. These streams fall inside Tennessee's Wild Trout distribution area, and potentially support native brook trout. Historical records indicate the majority of the property has not been logged or otherwise developed since at least the 1930's. A rich diversity of natural communities exists on the property including mature northern hardwood forests, Appalachian oak forest, boulder fields, and forest edge. Healthy stands with abundant white ash exist on the property, notable due to the spread of the emerald ash borer across the eastern United States. Scattered throughout the tract are small patches of early to mid-successional habitat, totaling approximately 8 acres, which offer promising nesting sites for the Golden-winged Warbler (GWWA). SAHC and its partners at USFS and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy



An unidentified bird nest observed on the Hump Mountain property. The tract is within Audubon Society's globally significant Roan Mountain Bird Area (SAHC).

Tennessee (continued)



A Gray's lily on the Hump Mountain property (SAHC).

have already enhanced more than 150 acres of forest edge and early successional habitat on nearby Hump and Little Hump Mountains, and these sites are readily occupied by nesting GWWA. Other important birds, including Alder Flycatcher and Vesper Sparrow have been identified within 2 miles of the property. In addition to avian species, the rare Gray's lily has been observed onsite. Notable plants observed near the tract include Roan Mountain bluet, northern lady fern, and small purple fringed orchid.

Partners in Conservation

The purchase was made possible by a generous gift from philanthropists Fred and Alice Stanback, a US Fish & Wildlife Service Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grant, and a bridge loan from The Conservation Fund. SAHC intends to own the property until funds are available for it to be transferred and added to the Cherokee National Forest.

“This is an outstanding example of how federal, state and private partners can work together to achieve common goals,” said JaSal Morris, Forest Supervisor, Cherokee National Forest. “When this proposed federal land acquisition is selected for funding it will be a great addition, not only to the Cherokee National Forest land base, but to the entire National Forest System”. Wendy K. Janssen, Superintendent of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail noted “We at the National Park Service are thrilled that the Hump Mountain tract will be preserved and protected as part of the AT landscape. This project is a model for our Landscape Conservation Initiative with the ATC and partners such as SAHC and US Forest Service.”

“Home-run”

“Land trusts must be strategic about the projects we pursue and this one met all of our objectives: the property is a pristine high-elevation tract joining a large conservation corridor of protected lands, and it falls within a few hundred feet of the most storied hiking trail in the world,” said Jay Leutze, SAHC president. It’s a conservation home-run and we’re grateful to the Julian family for being such good stewards of this special place.”



SAHC President Jay Leutze hikes the recently protected property (SAHC).

Link to SAHC’s full blog article on the Hump Mountain Project:

<https://appalachian.org/324-acres-tn-slopes-hump-mountain-now-protected/>

West Virginia

Working Lands for Wildlife : WV Golden-winged Warbler Initiative

By Katie Loucks, WV DNR/NRCS



Golden-winged Warbler (photo Holly Merker/Macaulay Library at Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

Once again, the Golden-winged Warbler is creating a buzz in West Virginia among landowners. 2017 was a year of focusing on outreach with the goal of generating excitement and interest in the Working Lands for Wildlife Golden-winged Warbler Initiative. A variety of tactics, ranging from social media posts to individual mailouts, were used to promote habitat enhancement for Golden-winged Warblers on private lands. An article in *Wonderful West Virginia Magazine*, which sold 22,183 copies, promoted habitat enhancement for Ruffed Grouse and Golden-winged Warblers. This alone resulted in 15 new landowners that could qualify for funding.

The partnership between AMJV, US Fish and Wildlife Service, NRCS, WV Division of Forestry, WV Division of Natural Resources, WVU Extension Service, and the Ruffed Grouse Society assisted landowners with habitat development and helped maximize outreach efforts by using their already established mailing lists and social media platforms. Thanks to these partners 74,519 people were reached by using 56 different outreach events.

Results of these outreach efforts are already being recognized in 2018. We have received 13 new applications, which could result in 200 additional acres enrolled in the program. Our goal is not only to continue assisting these landowners, but also have some become ambassadors of the program by allowing demonstration tours on their managed property.

The addition of a program coordinator in May 2017 will help 2018 be an even bigger year for West Virginia's Golden-wings. The expectations are to increase landowner technical assistance visits, correspondence, and individual outreach events, all while transforming more acreage to healthy and productive young forests.

Outreach and Education Advance Cerulean Warbler Work in West Virginia

By Steve Wilson, WV DNR/NRCS

In 2017, the Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project made significant strides to enhance Cerulean Warbler habitat in West Virginia. Strong efforts continue to inform private landowners, natural resources professionals, outdoor enthusiasts, United States Congressmen and women, and others of the work being done to enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife. With the help of several partners, including NRCS, West Virginia Division of Forestry, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, National Wild Turkey Federation, Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, and others, 54 individual outreach efforts were made to reach an estimated 61,945 additional individuals about the Cerulean Warbler project. A West Virginia

West Virginia (continued)



Cerulean Warbler (photo: Matt Shumar).

Wildlife television series, Facebook article, and statewide news release provided by WV Division of Natural Resources were a few of the most effective outreach efforts to gain interest from landowners. Additionally, workshops were held in Jefferson and Lewis Counties to show landowners and foresters the habitat management possibilities through the Cerulean Warbler project. The demonstration of multiple forest age classes and forest types at a Lewis County property allowed participants to hear multiple Cerulean Warblers within managed forestland enhanced through the Cerulean Warbler project, providing great representation of AMJV's mission to create a

dynamic forest landscape. Through these 54 outreach efforts in 2017, 134 new landowners have reached out with interest in enhancing their property for Cerulean Warblers and other wildlife species. Partners made 62 planning visits across the state and over 2,000 contacts by email, telephone, and mail to advance the objective of enhancing 4,000 acres of forest habitat in West Virginia by 2020.



John Cobb (far left), a forest landowner in Lewis County, WV, is enrolled in the AMJV's *Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project*. Last summer, he hosted forestry field visit on his property that was attended by 24 state and private forest and wildlife professionals. **See the more about John's conservation work on his property in the profile attached to the end of the Year in Review.**

Prescribed Fire Used to Enhance Habitat on Monongahela National Forest

By Kyle Crafts, USFS Monongahela National Forest

The Monongahela National Forest is making prescribed fire a priority to restore natural ecosystem processes throughout the Appalachian landscape. Historically fire was present on a frequent basis ignited naturally by lightning and artificially by Native Americans or European settlers. This helped maintain open forests of oak,

West Virginia (continued)

chestnut and pine over a large portion of the Appalachian Mountains including portions of the Ramshorn area. This area is located east of the Green Bank Observatory, just west of the West Virginia and Virginia border. Historically, the Ramshorn area was heavily burned by Native Americans and European settlers to maintain pasture for grazing and farming. This resulted in portions of the landscape being maintained in a savannah-type state with large, open mature trees interspersed with grasses and herbaceous vegetation. The lack of fire (natural or prescribed) throughout the twentieth century has significantly changed the landscape here, resulting in habitat loss for many birds and other wildlife associated with that historically open and brushy habitat.

Prescribed fire is a tool used by the Forest Service to establish, maintain or restore vegetation in fire-adapted ecosystems. Over 3500 acres were burned in the Ramshorn area in 2017, with 1579 acres prescribed for wildlife emphasis, of which 212 acres are currently open savannah-type habitat. This action will likely benefit a wide variety of avian species associated with early successional habitats, including some of the highest priority AMJV species that are also on the WV State Wildlife Action priority list and/or on the Forest Service Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS), such as the Golden-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Black-billed Cuckoo. Areas maintained in oak savannah conditions also will benefit priority and RFSS species such as the Red-headed Woodpecker.

Previous breeding bird surveys in the area recorded 64 different avian species with 641 detections. Additional surveys will be conducted in the area to assess bird community changes that may be associated with these and future prescribed fires. This should allow us to assess potential long-term effects of these restoration efforts.

West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Nearing Publication

By Rich Bailey, WV DNR

The final field season of the six-year atlas project was successfully completed in 2014. Staff coordinated agency activities, volunteer efforts and contracts and grants to assist the project and completed numerous days of field work to gather atlas data for breeding confirmations and abundance counts. Priorities have now shifted to outlining and writing chapters and species accounts for the forthcoming book.



Active prescribed burn within the Chestnut Ridge burn unit in Monongahela National Forest (photo: Kristy Jeros, USFS).

West Virginia (continued)

Final atlas summary:

- ⇒ Project duration of 6 years
- ⇒ Abundance sampling completed on over 400 priority blocks
- ⇒ Total bird observations for the entire atlas period now stand at 106,816.
- ⇒ Over 20,000 hours of volunteer effort logged by 378 participants
- ⇒ 179 species reported, 164 species confirmed breeding

Work completed in 2017:

- ⇒ Drafts now complete for all 171 breeding species
- ⇒ All species map sets now complete (distribution, change, occupancy, density)
- ⇒ Drafts of all maps for introductory chapters now complete (land cover, climate, physiography, etc)
- ⇒ Drafts of 2 introductory chapters now complete (Introduction, methodology)
- ⇒ Habitat and elevation characteristics appendix complete
- ⇒ Safe date and phenology appendices complete
- ⇒ Photo/media acquisition ongoing
- ⇒ Peer review and final manuscript will be completed by end of 2018

Loggerhead Shrike Work Continues

By Rich Bailey, WV DNR

Loggerhead shrike is West Virginia's most-threatened breeding grassland/shrubland bird species. This species is generally only found in pastures with a thorny shrub component, short grass and an abundance of natural and artificial hunting perches. The estimated current breeding population in West Virginia is no more than 20-30 pairs. Loggerhead shrike is declining across its range, and the drivers of this negative trend are poorly understood.

Staff monitored 20+ historical/recently-active loggerhead shrike sites during the reporting period in Berkeley, Grant, Greenbrier, Hardy, Jefferson, Monroe, Pendleton and Pocahontas counties. During breeding season Shrikes were observed at 7 of these sites (vs. 9 in 2016), all in the Greenbrier Valley. Breeding pairs were located at 6 of these sites. Two sites, in Greenbrier and Monroe counties, were newly-occupied after many years of absence. During the non-breeding season, shrikes were only reported in the Greenbrier Valley.

Staff continued to work with partners from nearby states and Ontario, CA in the coordination of a loggerhead shrike working group. Staff worked with partners to refine drafts of a conservation action plan and guide work with the species between partners. In winter 2017, staff co-led a formal working group meeting as part of the SE/NE Partners in Flight conference in Nashville, TN.



Juvenile Loggerhead Shrike banded in June 2017 in WV (photo: Rich Bailey).

West Virginia (continued)

Staff from WVDNR and VADGIF also partnered during the reporting period in West Virginia and Virginia on trapping and banding shrikes in both states. As part of this effort, 6 shrikes were located and trapped/banded in West Virginia during the reporting period. All birds were banded with color bands to enable field identification of individuals. In addition, feather samples were obtained that will answer questions pertaining to subspecies status and fitness of WV birds. This brings the total number of shrikes banded in West Virginia since spring 2014 to 32. Staff will continue to trap unbanded birds in 2017-2018 as part of an international partnership across eastern states and Canada. All banding will conform to the same protocol and will be directed by a regional coordinator.

Finally, staff coordinated with West Virginia University, VADGIF, and the Loggerhead Shrike Working Group to initiate a MS research project on shrike detectability, occupancy, and habitat in VA and WV. WVDNR supported this project by hiring a field technician that conducted hundreds of point counts in the Greenbrier, Monroe, and Pocahontas counties. These surveys detected 2 breeding pairs at previously-unoccupied historical sites.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Distribution and Habitat Use Better Understood in West Virginia

By Rich Bailey, WV DNR

The true distribution and abundance of our smallest owl species has long been an open question. Northern saw-whet owl breeding habitat usually, but not always, includes a conifer component. During the WV Breeding Bird Atlas 2 survey period, this species was detected at 13 locations statewide, including nest boxes monitored by WVDNR staff and volunteers on Briery Knob and at Blackwater Falls State Park. However, playback surveys were only conducted in a small subset of blocks containing suitable habitat.

In 2015 and 2016, WVDNR initiated a 2-year research effort to better-delineate distribution and habitat for the species using playback and modelling. Results overview:



Northern Saw-whet Owl (photo: Dan Mason/Macaulay Library at Cornell Lab of Ornithology).

- ⇒ 308 points were surveyed. At each point, a 15-minute passive listening period was followed by 15 minutes of recorded calls
- ⇒ Northern saw-whet owl was detected at 55 of these points, or 17.9%
- ⇒ Birds were detected as far north as Cooper's Rock SF and south to Pipestem SP.
- ⇒ Most birds were detected at high elevation in mixed spruce/northern hardwood habitats
- ⇒ Birds were captured and assessed for age, sex, fitness, and samples were collected for stable isotope analysis

West Virginia (continued)

During this reporting period, 9 individuals were banded. Additionally, Stable Isotope Analysis was completed to characterize the trophic webs for NSWOs in the Highlands of WV and found that approximately 84% of their food was coming from mammal heads (brains) and 11% was mammal bodies with the rest coming from invertebrates. *Arborimus*, *Sorex*, and *Peromyscus leucopus* were isotopically similar and made up ~73% of the NSWO diet, with lesser amounts from *Peromyscus maniculatus* and *Napaeozapus insignis*.

Geospatial modeling was also completed to determine the likelihood of presence of NSWOs in the Allegheny Mountains using GIS Maxent techniques. These models showed that there were 35,796 ha of habitat with a 50% probability of detecting NSWOs during the breeding season, with a potential of 178-712 breeding territories based on known territory sizes from the literature. Interestingly, with a 65% probability of detecting NSWOs the estimates only drop to 35,505 ha and 177-706 potential territories. However, at 90% probability of detecting NSWOs, it drops to 605 ha with only 3-12 potential territories. The jackknife tests showed that Shannon Diversity Kernel Density=500m was the most important variable in the model.



Our **mission** is to restore and sustain viable populations of native birds and their habitats in the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture region through effective, collaborative partnerships.

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AMJV Coordinator Todd Fearer (left), Communications Specialist Matt Cimitile (center), and Science Coordinator Becky Keller (right). Matt took a new job in August 2017 with the University of South Florida. He was a valuable part of the AMJV Team and broader bird conservation community. His communications expertise is sorely missed, especially for big projects like this Year in Review!

Profiles

IN

CONSERVATION

Leaving the world a better place

Wildlife benefit from landowner's stewardship goals

By Glenn Rosenholm



Retired business executive John Cobb has it pretty good—*really* good, in fact.

Cobb, age 76, owns 347 acres of mostly wooded and hilly land in Ireland, WV. The highest point on his property is a mountaintop that he calls “Cobb’s Knob” at 1,725 feet above sea level. His family calls this land “Grandpa’s Forest.” His residence features a recently built 4,600-square-foot house situated atop his mountain. His girlfriend, Betty, 82, was born a mile down the road. And they are still in good health.



Cobb cut timber to improve habitat for a number of bird species, including the cerulean warbler. (Courtesy photo by National Wild Turkey Federation/Matt Shumar)

Left: Cobb waves to the camera while taking a work break in the woods.

Yet with all he has, Cobb wanted even more—to leave his small part of the world a better place.

When he first bought his land back in 2006, no one had lived there for decades. Parts of it were overrun by invasive plants, and there were hardly any breaks in the forest canopy. Because his property was so uniformly forested, the biodiversity there was lower than it could be. He decided to make a few changes.

Cobb sought out professional advice to help him achieve his goals, and he later hired a private forester.

“He came out to my property in 2009 and estimated the board feet of my timber,” Cobb said. “He mentioned that I should get a [Forest Stewardship Plan](#), so I did.” The Forest Stewardship Program helps private forest landowners sustainably manage their forest land.



Forest Stewardship Program signs mark Cobb's land, indicating his participation in the program.



Snow melts off Cobb's house in the winter.



A culvert is installed to channel water and reduce erosion.



Cobb's land features a natural waterfall and unusual rock formations.

"I was then introduced to Travis Miller with the West Virginia Division of Forestry. He and I worked for several years to get the stewardship plan together and realized. He opened up all new vistas for me about what I could do with my land for myself and my family."

Cobb developed his personal, prioritized list of stewardship goals in consultation with his forester. They included these:

1. wildlife protection,
2. recreation,
3. soil conservation,
4. water quality, and
5. quality growth of timber for subsequent sale.

"I hate to cut timber," he said, "but all of the foresters that I talk to say that at a certain age of timber you have to cut it."

He started the plan in 2009, but didn't complete the development phase of it until 2015. The plan took an unusually long time to develop because he bought additional acreage and made improvements to his land, he said.

"In 2007 I finished cutting in a driveway. In 2008 I built a house. In 2010 I bought another 20 acres."

In total his land purchases included 180 acres in 2006, 20 acres in 2010, and 147 acres in 2013.

"For enacting the plan, it's still a work in progress," he added. "It's a 10-year plan."

"What my stewardship plan does is divide my property into 11 stands. The activity that I do in those stands is based on the dominant basal timber in those stands. If you have different timber in different stands, then that will affect your management activity."

He said most of his recent timber cut was comprised of poplar along with white and red oak.

"They recommended I do a clearcut of sections of the forest for wildlife, then selective cuts in the other areas of the land."

Cobb has become a big believer in stewardship plans. "It helps support my managed timber status with the West Virginia Division of Forestry, and it allowed me to work with the assessor and get a tax break on my property taxes."

Forest Stewardship Program signs identify participation with the following wording: "This forestland is being managed sustainably under a written forest management plan that meets Forest Stewardship Program standards in accordance with the State Forestry Agency and the USDA Forest Service."

One of his major wildlife goals was to increase habitat for the cerulean warbler, a migratory bird whose population declined 70 percent from 1966 to 1999, and is estimated to number about 560,000 today. The cerulean warbler's migratory range is large, stretching from New York to South America.

Cobb went to great lengths to get approval for his proposed project that would improve habitat for not just one bird, but for other species as well.

“When you create this habitat, it benefits deer, a variety of birds and other animals,” he added.

He subsequently gained approval for contracts to cut some of his timber in support of the [Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project](#). These cuts would create openings in the forest canopy, enhance cerulean warbler habitat, and in turn, enhance biodiversity on his land.

Cobb said he later did some “very extensive” work to promote the warbler. The project was done in conjunction with the [West Virginia Division of Forestry](#), [Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture](#), and [National Wild Turkey Federation](#).

“We created habitat last January through March, and it worked, as they found eight couples of warblers there this spring. The project involved U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and others.”



Clockwise from the top:

Cerulean warbler habitat restoration was the focus of Cobb's forestry project. (Courtesy photo by Natural Resources Conservation Service)

Cobb shared this portrait of a screech owl.

Woodcocks appear on Cobb's land in spring and fall each year.

Young Jake the wild turkey struts through the forest on a spring day.

A barred owl looks for a meal.



A ruffed grouse strolls across the forest floor.



A wild turkey and a young buck warily size each other up.



The back of John's all-terrain vehicle is loaded with equipment and tools that he routinely uses in the woods.



A logger chains cut logs together before hauling them away, during a clearcut harvesting operation on Cobb's land.

Making money, helping biodiversity

Cobb even made a little money along the way to making the world a slightly better place.

He received almost \$7,000 for his participation in the clearcut, and he sold his timber for an additional \$31,000 or so.

“People don’t know that they can get paid to make their property better. I wrote an article about it, and it was published in a number of newspapers.”

“That clearcut is the most amazing thing you can do for wildlife. White-tailed deer, wild turkey, ruffed grouse are already thriving here, and woodcock. They stop in here and raise their young, go up to Montreal, and go back down to New Orleans each fall. The U.S. Department of Agriculture folks have found yellow breasted chats here, and that is a rare sighting they say. Yes, it’s all working.”

He said the government paid him about \$1,800 for two smaller cuts on another conservation project.

All but 20 acres of his 347-acre property operate as a tree farm.

“I farm all of the indigenous trees on my property. There are farmers that plant trees for sale, but I try to stick with the indigenous trees on my property,” he added.

Trees on his land include these: tulip (yellow) poplar, red oak, white oak, black walnut, black cherry, hickory, butternut, chestnut oak, sugar maple, American beech, white pine, and red maple.

He also labored more than 120 hours in recent months to remove invasive plants that had grown and flourished during the decades his land remained vacant.

“I cut two grapevine sections. The forester goes in, and he sees grapevines from the ground to the top of the tree.

There was no one on this property since the 1930s.

Before that, there were just several small farms. Because no one had been on this land, some of the grapevines were 8 inches in diameter.



Yearlings with their mother look for food.



The grapevines can actually pull a [smaller or weakened] tree down in a bad storm.”

Other invasive plant species, including autumn olive, multiflora rose, and Japanese stiltgrass, are also being removed. Cobb said these species were, unfortunately, introduced by a State agency to reclaim the land following coal strip mine operations.

“When I’m up here working the different trails, one of my timber stand projects is cutting ash trees that had been killed by the emerald ash borer. I only have about 130 ash trees on my property, and I have cut 37 so far.”

Joy of success

When asked, Cobb said he is very pleased with the many visible and long-lasting results of his plan, so far.

“Sure, absolutely. When I did this clearcut Travis said this will be a perfect view. If you take the stumps out and plant fescue and clover it will be filled with grouse, wild turkeys, and deer because of the fescue and five different types of clover.”

“Travis went through my forest with my Stewardship Plan. It helped me to accomplish my goals when I did this clearcut. I built my house on a mountaintop. Based on his input, from 2010 to 2015, I hired a retiree from the Army Corps of Engineers to bulldoze fire trails for the fire safety of my forest, as well as recreation, and work access trails so that I could accomplish the work activities as defined in my Stewardship Plan. You have to have your trails wide enough in West Virginia so that the fire trucks can get in and put out the fire,” he said.

“He [Travis] said I should put one or two vernal pools in here. The dozer will put an 18-inch-deep cut in the ground to create the vernal pool that will be 25 feet long and one dozer blade wide. That will help frogs, snakes, etc. Vernal pools are only full in the rain and stay full for a short time, and refill the next time it rains,” he added.

A hillside on Cobb’s land shows plant regeneration soon after a clearcut harvesting operation.



Betty uses an all-terrain vehicle to plow John’s driveway.



A bulldozer operator creates a vernal pool for amphibians and other wildlife that depend on occasional bodies of water.



Members of the training team that visited Cobb's land are pictured, including: Kyle Aldinger, National Wild Turkey Federation cerulean warbler coordinator; Tom Wilsoncroft, Natural Resources Conservation Service soil conservation technician; and State Lands Manager Travis Miller and Assistant State Forester Barbara Breshock, both with West Virginia Division of Forestry.

"Ever since I was 6 years old I wanted to live in the woods, and now I've fulfilled my childhood dream. I've travelled all over the world in my business days. There's no place in the world that I haven't been or that I would want to go back and visit. This is where my heart is and where my focus is. I don't like leaving my mountaintop."

Cobb credited some of his progress to the substantial planning assistance he received from his forester.

"It was easier because Travis Miller is very good at what he does. I sent a letter to the West Virginia Governor about the value of foresters."

Path to Cobb's woods

By the number of improvements Cobb has made on his land in recent years, someone might think that he had spent his entire life on the land there working the rugged hills of West Virginia. That is not the case, though. His career took him far away from these scenic, rural parts for much of his life.

Cobb described his education and career path.

"I have a graduate degree in marketing with a minor in economics. I was senior vice president for CBS in New York City. I was also senior vice president for McGraw Hill Publishing Company in Washington, DC. At age 25 I was a general manager for four divisions of Bell and Howell Company. I had a short tenure after retirement with the National Wildlife Federation in Reston, VA," he said.

Cobb is no stranger to working outdoors, though.

"Before I finished college, I worked two summers for the Department of the Interior in Yellowstone National Park eradicating gooseberry bushes to make sure the [white pine blister rust](#) did not infect the white pines there. If you break the blister rust life cycle, you help the white pine."

Sharing results

Since starting his own plan Cobb has already helped four other landowners sign up for the Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project.

He also recommends that other retirees consider managing their own land.



John (far left) poses with participants during a forestry field visit.

“The average age of a farmer here in Lewis County is 60 years old. The majority of people who are stewarding forests in West Virginia are retired people. It’s a rewarding way to spend your later years and to do something good for the planet and for future generations. Best of all, with a Stewardship Plan in place landowners can get paid from the Farm Bill to improve their land. Nobody believed you can accomplish this invasive plant eradication with a chainsaw and a weed eater, like I did.”

“I also have two small fields in my woods that were old home sites from the 1930s. I did a back cut around both fields. My forester said I should cut 50 feet into the woods, except for a few types of mast producing trees. It is good for wildlife. I left small logs in place but sold the big logs. A back cut can be done by girdling or cutting the standing trees and leaving the fallen ones. Turkeys can bring their young into the fields without worry of predators.”

Cobb was noticeably proud of his accomplishments.

“From what the foresters tell me, no one else has done this many projects on their land in West Virginia in recent years,” he added.

Despite his occasional aches and pains from working so hard to improve his land Cobb said he wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.

“Ever since I was 6 years old I wanted to live in the woods, and now I’ve fulfilled my childhood dream. I’ve travelled all over the world in my business days. There’s no place in the world that I haven’t been or that I would want to go back and visit. This is where my heart is and where my focus is. I don’t like leaving my mountaintop.”



A scenic view of the surrounding landscape from atop John's mountain, Cobb's Knob, 1,725 feet in elevation.



John and Betty enjoy a quiet moment together.

Cobb's Woodland Stewardship Projects have included these:

- Cut grapevines in 2010 and 2014 through a USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).
- Completed two back cut borders around fields for wildlife in 2016.
- Just finished a 10-acre clearcut for wildlife in 2017.
- Performed two select cuts for cerulean warbler habitat improvement in 2017.
- Just worked through the 4th year of a 5-year autumn olive and multiflora rose invasive species control program.
- Plans to start an EQIP contract in 2018 for culling American holly and grapevines from a 20-acre section of his timberland.



Members of the local forestry community tour Cobb's property to examine project results.



A fawn hides in the underbrush.

Cobb says his motto in life is taken from a good fellow friend of the forest and the pond:

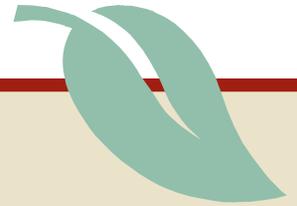
“ *I expect to pass through this world but once.
Any good therefore, that I can do or any
kindness that I can show for any fellow creature,
let me do it now. Let me not deter or neglect it,
for I shall not pass this way again.* ”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



Red foxes look for food in the snow.

*All photos courtesy of John Cobb
unless otherwise indicated.*



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