

2025 Streaked Horned Lark Working Group

UPDATES & MEETING MINUTES

Date:	30 September 2025
Location:	Port of Portland Headquarters (Portland, OR)
Notetaker:	Anita Michalak, Ecostudies Institute

Text in boxes was provided as a written update.

ATTENDEES

American Bird Conservancy (ABC): Lindsay Adrean
Bonneville Power Administration (BPA): Daphne Day, Oden Jahn, Brenna Blankenship
David Evans and Associates (DEA): Valerie Thompson
Ecostudies Institute (ESI): Stephanie Augustine, Gary Slater, Anita Michalak, Elspeth Kim
Ecological Land Services (ELS): Michele McGraw
Environmental Science Associates (ESA): Ilon Logan
Independent: Bob Altman
Institute Applied Ecology (IAE): Scott Harris, Laura Estrada
JBLM Fish & Wildlife: Tim Leque, Jim Lynch, Derek Dapp
JBLM Sentinel Landscapes: Naomi Gebo, Dan Calvert
Oregon Air National Guard: Aimee Sides
Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW): Martin Nugent
Oregon State University (OSU): Randy Moore
Port of Portland: Nick Atwell, Carrie Butler
Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe: Cyndie Sundstrom
Thurston County: Marisa Whisman
US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE): Marcus Roberts, Audrey Murray, David Griffith, Clayton Olinger, Kyle Tidwell
US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS): Nate Richardson, Anne Heron, Gabie Wolf-Gonzalez, Kris Sclafani, Khem So, Jose Carranza
Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW): Michelle Tirhi, Christa LeGrande, Abigail Sage

REGULATORY & RANGEWIDE UPDATES

Personnel Updates

- Will Ritchie retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, in July 2025. He misses working with the streaked horned lark conservation partners.
- Kim Flotlin retired in April 2025. She says hi to you all and is bummed to not be at this year's meeting!
- The USFWS Coastal Lowland Aquatic Marine Zone team added a new streaked horned lark co-lead – Gabie Wolf-Gonzalez. Gabie has been in our office for a few years now, based in our Wenatchee office, and just recently moved over to our team. She is getting up-to-speed on the species and excited to dive into lark conservation and recovery!

Listing, Litigation & Recovery Status Updates – Kris Sclafani (USFWS)

- Live update: heard back from judge today (Sept 30) about the litigation status and the Court ruled against USFWS, remanding the listing decision back to the Service

- Current threaten status will remain in place throughout the re-evaluation and the 4(d) rules reverts back to the 2013 language
- Judge's issue is a one-year turnaround
- In light of the ruling but also generally, there's a lot of need for a rangewide survey, but the likelihood that there will be funding is very low
- Will set up another meeting to discuss updates and implications, likely in Dec/Jan

USFWS Updates – Anne Heron (USFWS); Nate Richardson (USFWS National Wildlife Refuge)

Washington Coast Updates

- USFWS Willapa National Wildlife Refuge staff and partners successfully surveyed Leadbetter Point in June, July, and August. (Refuge staff reported those numbers).
- Unfortunately, we did not receive recovery funds for Fiscal Year 2025, so we did not have a chance to propose any recovery projects relating to lark recovery goals.
- Our office's Coastal Program has continued to support ongoing restoration projects that benefit streaked horned lark at Leadbetter Point via program funds- both on Refuge and State Parks lands; at Griffiths-Priday State Park; and they provided symbolic fencing to the Shoalwater Bay Tribe during the nesting season at Graveyard Spit.
- Partners at Washington State Parks are planning a 30-acre restoration project at the mouth of the Copalis River.
- Washington Department of Natural Resources treated Scotts broom in September and October 2024, continuing habitat restoration at the site for larks and plovers.
- Shoalwater tribal staff continued habitat restoration at Graveyard and Empire Spits through invasive species control by hand-pulling invasive beach grass.

Willamette Valley Refuge Complex Updates

- Baskett: Mowed and disced 4 fields in early May as soon as soil moisture conditions allowed that total 55 acres. We also ensure that 400 of the 1000 acres in Cooperative farming are passively managed to conditions that are suitable and attractive to SHLA including 1st year fescue plantings, summer fallow, or annual ryegrass fields that have been completely consumed by geese earlier that spring.
- Ankeny: We continue to mow and disc fields 6 and 6 lark, where larks were last observed (101 acres), and have not observed larks since ~2020.
- Finley: FWS staff mowed/disc/sprayed 75 acres. Staff observe a single pair early in the season, however the pair did not stick around to breed.
- Private Lands: FWS staff conducted SHLA surveys at 2 sites where larks have historically breed and that habitat work (not targeting SHLA's) was occurring. (Diamond Hill Wetlands and Alvadore Road WRP). No other surveys were done this year due to staff capacity.

WDFW Updates – Christa LeGrande (WDFW)

- SHLA surveys 2025 – WDFW conducted abundance surveys at Olympia Airport, Sanderson Field, and Tacoma Narrows Airport and occupancy surveys at Bremerton Airport (no detections) and Pacific Beach (no detections).
- SHLA surveys 2026 – Abundance survey effort planned at three-year rotation sites, including Midway, Leadbetter, and Damon Point on the coast and off-base South Puget Lowlands airports.
- The [BMPs for mitigating impacts to streaked horned lark on occupied airfields: Management recommendations for airfield managers](#), drafted by the Larks and Airports Working Group, was finalized in early 2025. WDFW has been meeting with WA airport partners to discuss where and how BMPs may be implemented.
- The Streaked Horned Lark Periodic Status Review is being reviewed internally and will be sent to partners for review in late 2025. WDFW anticipates the document being finalized and presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission in spring/summer 2026.
- Awarded grant funding to ESI in coordination with the Port of Olympia to conduct lark nest searches on Olympia Airport throughout the 2025 breeding season. Separate grant funding awarded to ESI to conduct breeding demography surveys and winter GPS tagging on the coast (Midway and Leadbetter) – see ESI section for more details.

- WDFW submitted for consideration the Maytown property, over 700 acres of glacial outwash prairie directly adjacent to WDFW's West Rocky Prairie, to the Lands 20/20 process. Determination on the recovery land acquisition grant is still pending.
- Lark and Airports Working Group finalized the BMPs document (see link above)
 - Intended specifically for airfield managers
 - Outlines BMPs for allowing airports to continue regular maintenance procedures while taking lark populations and presence into account; makes recommendations for how to mitigate impacts to larks
 - Forward any feedback you have to Christa
- WDFW and ESI working together to conduct demography and nest searches at Olympia airport (see ESI updates)
- Working on a lark periodic status review and state lark status review (latter will go out for review soon)
 - Working on adopting the federal recovery plan for state recovery rather than creating a whole new document

Q&A/Discussion

- Bob: BMP document consists of guidelines that are an interim plan for how to manage larks on airports, but don't apply to anything long-term
 - Michelle: in WA, populations on airfields will be maintained until there is an alternative for these populations and they can be maintained off airfields
 - Similar to the situation on JBLM; might not be the same for OR
- Martin: lark continues to not be listed in OR; no changes in management

POPULATION STATUS/RESEARCH UPDATES

Survey Table Overview

South Puget Sound

- Numbers seemed pretty stable overall; haven't been able to survey in Ranges 50 and 53 of AIA because of changed unexploded ordnance restrictions
- WA Airports: WDFW was on a 3-year rotation for SPS airport locations, but now surveying annually
 - Had no issues surveying Olympia Airport locations
 - Tacoma Narrows has always had few birds
 - Shelton Airport had concurrent surveys and nest searches

Washington Coast

- Surveys only conducted at Leadbetter; next year will likely also survey south part of the refuge
- Ongoing restoration work in the area, with focus gradually pushing north. Some of those northern areas aren't looking as suitable for lark habitat.
- Lots of juveniles seen on surveys

Columbia River

- Only conducted pre-placement surveys (more detail provided in USACE update below)

Northwest Oregon

- Lots of zeros of PDX Airfield; population was declining and is now absent
- Partnering with Metro staff to keep eyes on beach populations

Willamette Valley Airports

- Remaining airports were not surveyed this year; also not aware of any surveys coming up next year
- Valerie: Mulino Airport surveyed in 2025, no larks found

Other

- Conducted 3 replicate surveys at NWR sites; habitat transitioned significantly over the course of the season
- Coyote Creeks were all 0 this year; Erion Wetlands is under a Safe Harbor Agreement with FWS and are required to maintain lark habitat
- Last two years have done surveys at Christmas tree farms
 - The 3 Xmas tree farms where you see 0s are smaller and also embedded in a forested landscape
 - The last one with birds present is closer to a valley and more embedded in a prairie/open landscape

Table 1. Maximum counts of male streaked horned larks from annual surveys following standardized protocols as described in Pearson et al. 2016. Please note that these numbers are uncorrected for detectability and transect length; (NS = no survey). Also note that counts provided are all raw numbers and should not be used or interpreted outside of the context/model for which they were collected. Refer to Pearson and Keren (2024)** for modeled site abundance estimates for WA and the Columbia River Islands. Population estimates (and error values) are generated using N-mixture models (Keren and Pearson 2016*).

	Site	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Notes
Washington	South Puget Sound									
	13 th Division	15	16	20	26	25	16	9	23	
	Gray Army	28	12	15	22	22	29	13	13	
	McChord	21	21	30	31	24	17	24	24	
	91 st Range 76	18	17	27	NS	19	33	22	23	
	Range 50	1	2	2	NS	1	1	NS	NS	
	Range 53	1	2	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
	Olympia Airport	21	27	31	NS	NS	18	18	15	Concurrent nest searches (full season)
	Shelton Airport	6	6	3	NS	NS	6	3	1	Concurrent nest searches (1 week)
	Tacoma Narrows	3	NS	2	NS	NS	2	1	1	
	Washington Coast									
	Damon Point	0	NS	0	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	Unknown presence at site
	Graveyard Spit	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	Known presence at Empire Spit
	Johns River Island	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	Unknown presence at site
	Leadbetter Point	5	7	6	2/6	17	23	20	15	2024 and 2025: surveyed May, Jun, Jul
	Midway Beach	6	NS	2	NS	NS	9	NS	NS	Known presence; nest searches
	Oyhut Spit	0	NS	NS	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	No longer suitable lark habitat
Washington & Oregon	Columbia River									
	Austin Point	0	1	0	0	0	0	NS	NS	
	Brown Island	15	13	19	35	19	11	NS	NS	
	Crims Island	4	3	6	9	4	4	NS	NS	
	Howard Island	7	5	8	7	3	8	NS	NS	
	Hump Island	0	1	1	0	0	0	NS	NS	
	Lower Deer	3	4	5	6	2	1	NS	NS	
	Martin Bar	2	1	3	7	3	3	NS	NS	
	Miller Sands Island	10	9	10	11	3	3	NS	NS	
	Pillar Rock Island	2	3	3	5	3	2	NS	NS	
	Rice Island	17	31	31	62	44	34	NS	NS	
	Sand Island	1	2	5	6	4	3	NS	NS	
	Sandy Island	5	4	6	5	0	1	2	0	1 heard in June during veg survey
	Tenasillahe	1	3	2	3	1	1	NS	NS	
	Welch Island	1	3	0	0	0	0	NS	NS	
	<i>Other Sites: Larks were also detected at James River in 2020 (pair) and 2021 (single male) on the lower Columbia River following occupancy protocol.</i>									

*Keren, I.N. and Pearson, S.F. 2016. Research Progress Report: Streaked Horned Lark Abundance and Trends for the Puget Lowlands and the Lower Columbia River/Washington Coast, 2010-2015: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Science Division, Olympia, Washington. 25 pp.

**Keren, I.N. and Pearson, S.F. 2024. Streaked Horned Lark Abundance and Trends for the Puget Lowlands and the Lower Columbia River/Washington Coast, 2010-2023: Research Progress Report. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Science Division, Olympia, Washington

Table 2. Estimated pairs of streaked horned larks based on annual surveys following various protocols in Oregon.*(NS = no survey). Please note that these numbers are uncorrected for detectability and effort.*

	Site	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Notes
Oregon	NW Oregon									
	SW Quad PDX	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	PDX Airfield	3	2-3	3	0	0	0	0	0	
	Rivergate	1	0	0	0	0	NS	0	NS	
	St. Johns (Metro)	1+/-	0	NS	0	0	0	NS	NS	
	Fort Stevens	0	1	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
	Sauvie Island	0	0	0	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
	WV Airports									
	Corvallis	60+	83+	26+	NS	NS	NS	43+	NS	
	Cottage Grove	0	NS	NS	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	
	Eugene	NS	NS	NS	NS	2	39	NS	NS	
	Independence State	0	16	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
	Lebanon State	0	NS	2	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	
	McMinnville	8	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	NS	NS	
	Salem	0	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	NS	NS	
	Scappoose	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	0	NS	NS	
	Other									
	Ankeny	6	6	4	3	NS	1	0	0	
	Baskett	37	35	41	33	NS	24	32	17	
	Finley	10	11	3	7	NS	0	1	0	
	Private Lands - WRPs	8	7	10	10	NS	9	12	8	
	Herbert Farm	0	3-3	5-4	5-4	3-2	2-2	NS	0	
	Coyote Creek South*	4-5	5-5	4-4	1	1	0	0	0	
	Coyote Creek Northeast*	NS	NS	NS	0	3-4	5-7	2-4	0	
	Erion Wetlands	NS	2-3	6-5	7-14	17-15	15-9	7-9	8-15	
	Diamond Hill Wetlands	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	1	1	
	Private Lands – Xmas Tree	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	0	0	
	Private Lands – Xmas Tree	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	0	0	
	Private Lands – Xmas Tree	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	0	0	
	Private Lands – Xmas Tree	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	48-26	53-46	

*Note: The two numbers represent high counts of males during the first nesting season (May – mid-June) and the second nesting season (late June – July). These are presented separately to highlight the changes that often occur due to within-season changes in habitat and populations from plant succession and/or nesting disruption due to field operations.

Olympia Airport Breeding Monitoring Update – ESI and WDFW

In 2025, Ecostudies, in collaboration with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife through funding from the Wildlife Diversity Grant program, initiated a project to improve our understanding of the population dynamics of larks on Olympia Airport under standard operations, maintenance, and safety procedures. The objectives of this project are to start building a foundation of reproduction, survival, and dispersal data that will lead to recommendations for airfield management to support a stable lark population and contribute to the species' recovery strategy. We monitored an estimated 20 pairs and located and documented the fate of 21 nests. We determined that 11 nests fledged at least one nestling, and we banded 19 young. Pending approval from the Port of Olympia, we will continue demographic monitoring in 2026.

Willamette Valley Survey Protocol Update ([see slides](#)) – Stephanie Augustine (ESI)

The goal of this multi-phased project is to develop a road-based survey protocol for determining distribution, population size and trends of streaked horned larks using private lands in the Willamette Valley. In this region, land ownership and ephemeral habitat suitability precludes the use of existing standardized line transect survey methods successfully used elsewhere in the lark's geographic range. This pilot study will help address uncertainty surrounding

the execution of critical elements of a monitoring effort at a smaller-scale prior to full implementation throughout the Willamette Valley. To develop a protocol for monitoring the breeding population of streaked horned larks in the Willamette Valley, we implemented several steps in the design and collection of data over several years of fieldwork and analysis.

2022-2023: Original pilot data collected

We modified an existing lark habitat suitability model (Hatten et al. 2019) using normalized difference vegetation index values across the landscape to generate spatially balanced survey points distributed within three USFWS-designated streaked horned lark recovery zones. In 2022, we conducted 8-min point count surveys at 214 points between 1 and 30 June, detecting 55 streaked horned larks at 28 points (13% of sites). In 2023, we used the same protocol and surveyed 360 points between 3 May and 15 June, and detected 42 larks at 31 points (8.6% of sites).

2024: Evaluating multiple potential causes for low detection rates

We evaluated potential factors influencing detection rates including issues with the habitat suitability model, with the survey protocol, or whether the low detection rates represented true population size and distribution. In 2024, we surveyed 31 roadside points and 29 off-road sites at known lark breeding locations (Coyote Creek, Erion Wetlands, Baskett Slough, and Corvallis Airport). Surveys were 30min long, detections recorded in each minute, with a playback component at minute 24 and 27; most points were also surveyed twice at least one week apart. We recorded 208 lark detections at 72% of surveys (52% roadside, 93% off-road). Further takeaways include violations of distance sampling assumptions as a modeling method for the perceptibility component of the detection process; no difference between roadside and off-road detection processes, and no increase in detectability with playback.

2025: A modified roadside protocol

In 2025, we used the results of the previous 3 years to inform the new roadside survey field protocol; a single 12-min survey with a 3-min waiting period at the start, and no conspecific playback. Results and implications for future survey work will be discussed at the meeting.

This project is assisted by a technical advisory group including: Bob Altman, Sarah Converse (USGS/Univ. of WA), Beth Gardner (Univ. of WA), Scott Pearson (WDFW), and Randy Moore (OSU). For a copy of the reports from 2022-2024 contact Stephanie Augustine at (saugustine@ecoinst.org).

Q&A/Discussion

- What was the relationship between detectability in 2023 vs 2024?
 - Availability component was very low, meaning that overall detection probability was also low (~6%)
- Points were weighted by NDVI value
 - Random selection within each recovery zone → chances of getting selected were higher in places where habitat was more suitable
- Between year surveys are not direct comparisons
- Habitat suitability model works currently; next steps would be to determine our power to analyze trends over time
- How many times did you go to these points and find that the model hadn't chosen good lark habitat?
 - Less than a quarter of the time
 - The flipside happened more often than expected (found larks in areas you wouldn't normally expect)
- Not going to render the most accurate abundance estimates → next area of research/discussion
- Do we want distance sampling in the final protocol? Works well in lots of areas
- Need to pull satellite imagery every year because there are lots of changes between years, and even between seasons
- Haven't incorporated absence data because you can't call a survey absence a true absence

JBLM Breeding Monitoring Update ([see slides](#)) – Stephanie Augustine (ESI)

In 2025, Ecostudies assisted Joint Base Lewis-McChord with efforts to minimize human impacts to larks from airfield management and training and to collect demographic monitoring data to investigate limiting factors. This year was the 13th year of intensive nest monitoring at two sites (32 pairs at Gray Army Airfield, 34 pairs at McChord Airfield), and the 15th year at one site (26 pairs at 13th Division Prairie). Nests were also monitored at Range 76, largely by JBLM personnel (19 pairs). Of the estimated 111 nest-monitored pairs, we located and documented the fate of 184 nests and determined that 115 nests successfully fledged at least one nestling. We banded 166 young, and we collected feather samples for genetic determination of sex, which will allow us to understand sex-specific first-year survival.

Throughout the breeding season, we retrieved GPS tags from 8 adult larks throughout the breeding. A total of 13 larks were resighted with their tags (of 26 deployed; 50% return rate). We were unable to retrieve 5 tags. One was an adult female that was resighted twice in late April at McChord Airfield but never resighted again. We made multiple attempts to recapture the other four birds, all adult males, using conspecific playback in their territory, while they attended their nestlings, or in flocks during the post-breeding season. No uncaptured tagged birds from 2023 were resighted. All retrieved tags were functional and all but one recorded departure from and return to the South Puget Sound (one battery failed prior to the bird returning to JBLM). We deployed 30 GPS tags in 2025; 16 tags on adult larks and 14 on independent juveniles. The tags are archival and programmed to record locations every 2-6 days throughout the nonbreeding season. We will retrieve tags in spring 2026. Results will further elucidate patterns of lark movement during migration, including the use of off-base South Puget Sound prairie sites.

Q&A/Discussion

- Both birds that did stopovers in the South Sound were female—are females more likely to make stopover visits during the spring/pre-breeding time? (unknown)
- Bob: most visits happened on the west side of the valley
 - Randy: birds have also wintered in the southeast area of the valley
- Coast birds: patches were slightly bigger than breeding territories; much more sedentary than we expected them to be

Demographic Monitoring and Nonbreeding Season Movement of Larks on WA's Coast – Stephanie Augustine (ESI)

Ecostudies Institute, with funding from WDFW's Wildlife Diversity Grant program, initiated a project to fill existing information gaps on lark distribution, demographics, and habitat use on the Washington coast. This project is part of a multi-species effort including snowy plovers. Specific lark objectives include: 1) deploying archival GPS tags to understand nonbreeding season movement and habitat use and assess potential threats during the nonbreeding season and 2) initiating demographic monitoring to evaluate factors influencing vital rates. During the post-breeding season in 2024, we deployed eight archival GPS tags on larks captured at Midway Wildlife Management Area, and in 2025, we successfully retrieved 2 of the 3 tags on returned birds. Numerous efforts were made to recapture the third bird throughout the breeding and post-breeding season. We deployed an additional five GPS tags at Midway during the 2025 season, fewer than the anticipated goal of fifteen. Unique challenges of trapping at coastal sites led to the development of innovative trapping techniques over the breeding and post-breeding season with increased success, and we believe future efforts would yield higher capture rates. We initiated demographic monitoring at both Midway Wildlife Management Area and Leadbetter Point, where we located and documented the fate of 20 nests. We determined that 12 nests fledged at least one nestling, and we banded 8 young. We will continue demographic monitoring and retrieve GPS tags in 2026.

Developing a Reintroduction Program for Streaked Horned Larks – Gary Slater (ESI)

Establishing new local populations of streaked horned larks (SHLAs) is a critical strategy to meet recovery goals listed in the Draft SHLA recovery plan. Previous work included completing a field project to trial and compare the effectiveness of soft-release techniques on a surrogate horned lark subspecies, implement a decision-analytic process involving workshops, expert elicitation, and a predictive model to assess alternative release strategies at potential reintroduction sites and 3) create an implementation strategy for a comprehensive reintroduction

program. The project is a collaboration among Ecostudies Institute, USGS, the WA Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the Univ. of WA, and WDFW.

The predictive model (Sipe et al., in review), using the South Sound IPM (Bratt et al., in review) indicated releasing adult SHLA breeding pairs with dependent young at Glacial Heritage for 11 years, where 7 pairs and young are released in a year, resulted in the highest population abundance and lowest probability of persistence. Existing breeding sites were minimally impacted by serving as a source for reintroductions. The publications are going through USGS peer review and are anticipated to be available soon. A draft implementation plan has been developed. Upon release of the USGS publications, this will be finalized and available for review and comment.

Ecostudies Institute has received funding from Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) to begin permitting and compliance requirements to establish off-base populations of ESA-listed Streaked horned lark. This project, which will be in conjunction with federal and state partners and a local consulting firm (Alta Science and Engineering) will work through federal and state permitting requirements as part of the ESA, NEPA, and SEPA, with a goal of developing a programmatic conservation benefit agreement. Landowner outreach and communication will also be an important part of this process and is anticipated to include meeting with landowners, facilitating discussions, developing assurances, and "translating" between regulatory/scientific/non-technical communication to ensure all parties are engaged and understood. The actions in this activity will provide regulatory certainty and community support for SHL translocation. Completion of the project could provide a pathway for establishing a nascent off-base SHL population and contributing to long-term recovery. Establishment of new populations would also serve as a critical step in reducing regulatory restrictions and increasing training flexibility at JBLM.

Q&A/Discussion

- Assuming it'll be about a two-year process with the goal of starting reintroductions in 2028
- Highest success method is translocating pairs with dependent nestlings (3-5 day old nestlings); abandonment possibility is low at this stage
- Supplemental feeding would involve a combination of seeds + mealworms
- Predator control is modeled in the paper

Progress Creating SHLA Habitat on a Prairie Site at JBLM ([see slides](#)) – Gary Slater (ESI)

- Success story about creating grassland habitat for larks
- Between 2013 and 2023, lark distribution on 13th Division Prairie/TA14 on JBLM has more than doubled from what we had 10 years ago.
- Vegetation height hasn't changed as dramatically as some of the other variables
- Limiting factor is always bare ground; can't burn during lark season, but have started winter burning on JBLM and that seems to be helping with some grasses
- Implementing BANAs (Buffered Active Nesting Areas) has helped lift populations
- Vegetation management plan on JBLM: [Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan](#) (publicly available)

Leadbetter Point: 2025 Streaked Horned Lark Breeding Survey and Habitat Stewardship – Khem So (USFWS)

Abundance Surveys

Streaked horned lark adult breeding surveys were conducted once monthly in May, June, and July in the traditional survey area on Willapa National Wildlife Refuge (Willapa NWR) at Leadbetter Point. The maximum total count of males detected during standardized streaked horned lark abundance surveys equaled 15. A mean of 13.7 streaked horned larks were detected per survey with an average of 10.3 male larks observed per survey. This year's survey transect length extended 13,430 meters (8.3 miles) encompassing most of the suitable federally designated critical habitat at Willapa NWR. Additional unsurveyed, potentially suitable habitat at Leadbetter Point is located outside the streaked horned lark survey area. During their streaked horned lark surveying and nest searching, Ecostudies Institute documented both nests and occurrences outside of the standardized survey area.

Data collection for spatial analysis of lark occurrence continued in 2025. This effort combines lark detection data, nest locations, and observed lark tracks to spatially identify occupied breeding territories. Between Refuge- and Ecostudies Institute-led efforts, seven unique lark nests were discovered, and over 50 lark track locations were added to the hundreds of track locations recorded over the past several years. At least five nests were known to have hatched and two were known to have fledged. Juvenile YOY birds were observed at several locations.

Nonbreeding Season

Streaked horned larks and their tracks are consistently observed at Leadbetter Point during the non-breeding season. Larks can be seen foraging year-round along the high tide wrack line on the ocean beaches and in the habitat restoration area. Ecostudies Institute began a project last year to investigate streaked horned larks on the Washington coast using archival GPS tags to track nonbreeding season movements and habitat use. They were able to capture and band a male on the Refuge in April. This male and other banded larks were resighted on the Refuge during the breeding season.

Predator Management

Predator management was implemented at Leadbetter Point from 2013–2021. Two species of corvids have been identified as potential predators in and adjacent to lark nesting areas. There were fewer corvids, especially crows, encountered during most surveys in 2025. No active predator management, hazing, or lethal removal was conducted this year.

Habitat Restoration

Approximately twenty acres of beach on Willapa NWR at Leadbetter Point were cleared of *Ammophila* beachgrass using a bulldozer and disk prior to the start of the breeding season. These areas are located north of and adjacent to previously treated areas. In September 2024, 150 acres on Refuge lands were aerially treated with herbicide to reduce the density of resprouting beachgrass.

Data Collection and Management

An ESRI Field Maps application is being used on mobile devices to collect survey data, including lark detections, tracks, and nest attributes. Field Maps is also used to track habitat management actions.

PDX Streaked Horned Lark Survey Results & Observation Summary – Carrie Butler (Port of Portland)

Southwest Quadrant (SW Quad)

For the year of 2025, there were no SHLA observations in the Southwest Quad area of PDX. The annual winter abundance survey was conducted on February 27th with no encounters. Likewise, there were no encounters during breeding season surveys conducted on May 13th, June 3rd, and June 24th. Since 2020, there have been no breeding pairs observed and only one male encountered in 2022 during the breeding surveys.

PDX Airfield Activity

SHLA activity on the airfield has generally declined since 2021. Suitable nesting and foraging habitat remain available on and around the airfield so other impacts may be the cause for the lack of activity.

PDX SHLA Nests & Band Observations

The last confirmed nest on the airfield was during the breeding season of 2020, near Taxiway B2. One of those young-of-year (YOY) fledglings was observed again later in the Fall of 2020, with an adult female and 2 adult males. The last observed SHLA with bands occurred in 2021 near Taxiway W. It was foraging with a small flock of unbanded SHLA's that consisted of 3 adult females and 1 adult male.

Rivergate

The Port anticipated a gradual decline in SHLA nesting pairs as suitable habitat is lost to development, with an estimated 3 nesting pairs in 2018 and zero nesting pairs thereafter. Surveys were not required in 2025. The next scheduled surveys for Rivergate will occur in 2027 (per USFWS).

Sandy Island

During the 2025 breeding season, a total of 3 surveys were conducted by the Port on May 14th, June 3rd, and June 25th. No SHLA were encountered during the scheduled surveys however one was heard during the vegetation survey on June 24th. Wildlife activity observed during these surveys included European starling, American crow, American goldfinch, American robin, white-crowned sparrow, bald eagle, purple martin, osprey, Bullock's oriole, violet-green swallow, and tree swallow.

A thick layer of moss was scraped from the southern part of the site in November 2022. The scraped area was sparsely seeded with a low-growing mix of native grasses and forbs in February 2024. Vegetation monitoring results from June 2025 still show 69% moss cover. We are currently planning for moss removal in January 2026.

Sandy Island Comparison from 2017 – 2025

It was projected in the HCP that the site can support up to five nesting pairs from Year 2 (2018) through Year 30 of the HCP implementation period. SHLA numbers dropped to zero in the 2022 breeding season. Stochastic events such as the heat wave of summer 2021 and the very wet spring of 2022 may have resulted in undue stress on nesting SHLAs. Some SHLA activity was observed in 2023 and 2024 but sightings dropped again in 2025. The numbers below represent the greatest number in that category observed during any single survey during the breeding season.

Population Monitoring in the Southern Willamette Valley, 2024-2025 – Bob Altman

- This project provided an opportunity to evaluate a range of approaches to prairie restoration and lark habitat and populations on conservation lands, and the first systematic effort to assess lark populations on Christmas tree farms.
- Eight sites were surveyed over two years, three of which were surveyed both years. This included four conservation properties undergoing prairie restoration from former agricultural fields, and four private land Christmas tree farms.
- Three of the Christmas tree farms had no larks, and two of the prairie restoration sites had only one detection or detections on only one visit, suggesting the absence of a breeding population.
- The lark population at a prairie restoration site with dedicated lark-specific habitat management under a Safe Harbor Agreement had moderate lark populations (7-15 pairs).
- The lark population at the largest Christmas tree farm was one of the highest for any site in the Willamette Valley (approximately 50 pairs), and likely the result of the amount of suitable habitat conditions and an open landscape context of other agricultural lands with potential lark habitat.
- The differences in lark populations at the prairie restoration sites were dependent on required annual management for larks based on a regulatory Safe Harbor Agreement (relatively large population), the creation of vernal pools with no lark-specific prescriptions or management (temporary and small breeding populations to no breeding populations), and prairie restoration without vernal pools and no lark-specific management (occasional lark use but no breeding population).
- The two most salient takeaways from Christmas tree farm surveys were that larks occur in some habitat conditions outside the standard description of lark habitat, and the importance of an open herbaceous-dominated landscape adjacent to or in close proximity to the site that also has potential lark habitat.

RESTORATION & ACQUISITION UPDATES

What are the Barriers to Creating Lark Reserves in WV? – Bob Altman

- How do we prioritize larks and habitat in a decision-making process as they compete with other species existing on the prairie/grassland landscape?
- Biggest piece/barrier is policy
 - Eg: NRCS policies on bare ground; erosion is a primary concern; have standards that require them to have a certain level of vegetation cover
- Is single-species management a barrier?
- The only way to get swaths of land as large as we need is to make them working lands

Restoring Nesting Habitat for Larks at Herbert Farm Natural Areas – Laura Estrada & Scott Harris (IAE)

The Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE), in partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife – Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (ODFW-OCRF) and in collaboration with Bob Altman, is working to restore nesting habitat patches at Herbert Farm Natural Area. Herbert Farm once supported multiple streaked horned lark (SHL) nesting pairs following the conversion of agricultural land to chemical fallow, which provided the bare ground conditions this species requires. However, as restoration progressed, the site transitioned into a heavily vegetated upland prairie. This increase in vegetation has reduced available SHL habitat, leading to little evidence of recent breeding on the site.

This project follows a study conducted by IAE and Bob Altman in 2022–2023 that assessed the effectiveness of created swales for SHL nesting habitat. In that study, we found the swales are effective but only when the timing of the breeding season and drying period align. For the current project we created 12 habitat patches adjacent to swales using herbicide, flame torching, and mowing. In 2025, we evaluated SHL use of the patches and surrounding areas. We documented just one early-spring record in a nearby hazelnut orchard and another foraging observation in August 2025.

We plan to continue patch treatments in 2026 and will conduct another round of SHL surveys. In addition, we will present ODFW with a cost and time evaluation to help inform logistical decisions for creating SHL habitat within the Willamette Valley.

- Need to find the correct timing with swales and their level of vegetation/upkeep/etc.
- Agreement is only two years of active management and then it closes
- ISO creative ideas for quickening the pace of creating habitat (solarization, gravel, etc.)

Columbia River Surveys and Monitoring Updates ([see slides](#)) – David Griffith, Kyle Tidwell (USACE)

- Lots of personnel changes
- Still in consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) about the biological opinion
 - Will include some brand new sites, but covers both old and new
- Two different types of monitoring: abundance surveys and pre-placement surveys
- Rice Island updates
 - Lots of Caspian terns and ring-billed gulls
 - Home to 40-50 lark pairs every year; continued question of how do we remove the gulls but keep larks
 - 2024: started seeing site fidelity of gulls on the island
 - Lark surveys in 2025: 21 males, 44 individuals found
 - Monitoring larks during dissuasion has not shown any evidence of an adverse response
- Plans for 2026:
 - Hazing of terns and gulls at Miller Sands; also pelican dissuasion
 - Will continue pre-placement surveys
 - 2026 will kick off 3-year cycle of surveys coinciding with WDFW population surveys