2025-26 Oregon Vesper Sparrow Working Group Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Date:	5 March 2026 (Virtual)
Notetaker:	Stephanie Augustine (Ecostudies Institute)

Text in boxes was provided as a written update.

ATTENDEES

American Bird Conservancy (ABC): Lindsay Adrean
Avifauna Northwest: Bob Altman, Joel Geier
Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Aaron Teets
Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM): Sanders Freed
Ecostudies Institute (ESI): Anita Michalak, Stephanie Augustine, Gary Slater
Greenbelt Land Trust (GLT): Andy Neill, Lisa Millbank
JBLM Fish & Wildlife: Timothy Leque, Jim Lynch
JBLM Integrated Training Area Management (ITAM): Sally Jones
Klamath Bird Observatory (KBO): Sarah Rockwell, Jaime Stephens
OR Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW): Martin Nugent
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Solomon Ziegert
US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS): Kristine Sclafani, Gabrielle Robinson, Zachary Radmer, Nate Richardson, Lily Calderon
WA Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW): Christa LeGrande, Scott Pearson, Coral Pasi, Michelle Tirhi

REGULATORY & RANGEWIDE UPDATES

USFWS Listing Status & OR State Update – Kris Sclafani (USFWS)

- Original plan was to have the working group meeting in the fall, but USFWS were furloughed at the beginning of October 2025.
- Completed Species Status Assessment (SSA) process; briefings at various levels within the service, driving toward 12-month finding to be published in the federal register. The current plan is to get the document out for review in September 2026.
    - Gabrielle Robinson confirms being on track to publish this year; could be fiscal year, but December 2026 at the latest.
    - Still in the pre-decision working environment and cannot provide more information at this time. The WG will receive a link when the document is available on the federal register for input.
- Martin Nugent: OR SWAP was submitted for approval in Oct 2025; OVSP were listed as a priority species in the new plan, with hopeful new ability to direct more resources toward OVSP.

USFWS WA State Updates – Zach Radmer (USFWS)

- OVSP in WA: in 2025, USFWS and JBLM included OVSP as a conference species in the Biological Opinion, providing JBLM with targets for birds either on-base, off-based, or a combination of both.

- In 2022, Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) was put in place with Thurston County that includes impacts and mitigation for OVSP. Two additional HCPs are currently in the works that include OVSP habitat provisions: Yelm and Tumwater/Port of Olympia.
- DoD funding to conduct OVSP in WA: draft report not yet finished, but birds were generally absent.

Washington State Recovery Plan Discussion – Christa LeGrande (WDFW)

- State status review and recovery plan: WDFW is writing a state recovery plan in coordination with USFWS to evaluate threats and potential recovery options. This plan will be combined with the Periodic Status Review, which is due for re-evaluation in 2026. Anticipated completion of this plan is mid-2026.

- WDFW is in the process of updating the periodic status review this year.
    - In 2021, Bob and others wrote the status report. Need updating every 5 years per WA state code.
    - Periodic status review outlines natural history requirements, threats and actions to ameliorate them, as well as proposes state listing. In 2021, commission approved endangered status; no changes to proposed status are expected. For any listed species, required to have a recovery plan, but don't currently have one for OVSP.
- Recovery plan details threats and actions more intensely than the periodic status review, and also includes action plan, priorities, and actions needed to achieve priority goals. It more thoroughly details the various recovery criteria that outlines what the "recovered" species state looks like in Washington.
- The recovery plan is written first, goes out for public comment, followed by the periodic status review. The plan is not required to be approved/reviewed by the commission (just public comment is needed), so the plan and periodic status review are not released in conjunction.
- Recovery plan will be ready sometime this year; WDFW currently solicited information for building the plan and garnering involvement.
- Q&A/Discussion:
    - Gary: How does WDFW partner with USFWS in identifying comparable recovery criteria?
        - Christa: Lots of coordination; USFWS provides WDFW with information that can be included in the recovery plan.
        - Kris: Last year, USFWS and WDFW held training for another species to make sure all agency staff involved were on the same page. The state listing timeline for OVSP is ahead of the federal timeline, so USFWS is supporting as best as possible.
        - Gary: ESI staff also happy to be involved in the planning process with WDFW.
        - Christa: WDFW does not have specific guidelines for what the recovery plan will look like. WDFW has been working with USFWS to revise processes at the state level, so the WA recovery plan outlines will aim to follow the same structure as federal plans.
        - **Action:** Christa will send out an interest poll to gauge interest in recovery plan drafting/involvement from WG.
    - Bob: What is the timeline for the recovery plan?
        - Christa: No specific timeline, but will put out a request for info to the public, which is usually 6-12 months before putting any drafts out for public comment. Will also need to sort out the logistics of a potential population viability analysis (PVA) and the amount of time needed to complete one.
    - Threats, actions, and factors affecting the species will be the same in the recovery plan as in the periodic status review. E.g.: habitat loss and degradation, small population effects, population-level effects from predation and climate change, etc.
        - Bob: Hatch rates are about 80% for Puget and Willamette, which isn't alarming but is below the expected 90%. Consider looking into the cause?
    - Christa: Having a better understanding of the genetics in WA would also be helpful.
        - Scott/Stephanie: Current feather sampling is limited to pin feathers, which may not contain sufficient genetic material for analyses of inbreeding, population structure, etc.
        - Zach: May have $10-20k of available funds to support an OVSP genetics study.
        - Kris: Could be worth looking into rangewide genetics (rather than exclusively WA), but funding might be an issue.

        - Sarah: KBO banding efforts have been focused on GPS birds, with no feather collection. Potentially have some samples (<20) from a graduate student.
        - Christa: Given the recovery plan timeline, genetics results would be tricky to incorporate into the plan, but would be helpful for the PVA. If we think this is a potential stressor that will influence what our metrics and recovery criteria look like in WA, it would be helpful to have the information before publishing.
        - Scott: Given the sample size needed, not likely to have genetic results this year.
        - Jaime: Suggest a tiered study approach; KBO would be interested in participating and raising funds.
        - Gary: Could we pair SHLA and OVSP genetic work? Previous SHLA genetic work occurred during a bottleneck over 10 years with strong inbreeding/relatedness, so would be interesting to see where things are at with SHLA recovering from the bottleneck now.
        - **Action:** Stephanie and Anita will reach out to the Bird Genoscape Project to brainstorm OVSP genetics project logistics, probable costs, etc.
    - Christa: Other aspects of the recovery plan to consider include movement/connectedness between sites in WA (are we still reticent to tag birds in WA?) and MOTUS towers.
        - Gary: No observed movement between two populations in the South Sound. ESI has conducted conspecific attraction work in sites that look like best habitat, but we aren't seeing colonization to these sites. Is it a question of habitat, small population demographics, landscape corridors? A movement study would be helpful for addressing this.
        - Bob: Seen a fair amount of dispersal in the WV; have fragmented landscapes there too and tend to rule out lack of landscape corridors as the driver.

POPULATION STATUS & RESEARCH UPDATES

Ecoregional Research Summary Overview

- See table on next page
- Q&A/Discussion:
    - Christa: What are the exact factors improving habitat for OVSP?
        - Gary: Factors limiting OVSP include availability of bare ground (hard to keep and maintain)/bunchgrass-dominated landscape. Other things, specifically at the Weirs, include thinning of trees along the edge. Prescribed fire into these edges makes them more open.
        - Jim: JBLM is managing for perches, specifically snags. Limited in management in the AIA, but can create perches.
        - Bob: Habitat restoration/shrub component of OVSP habitat; shrubs are more than just perches for singing and also provide cover for fledglings as well as molting adults in July and August. April was dry at Bald Hill Farm this year, which caused herbaceous vegetation to suffer. There was a big jump in OVSP moving from pastureland to restored prairie because it didn't grow as tall and dense as usual.
        - Lisa: At Bald Hill Farm, noticed lots of use of thickets of blackberry and roses by post-breeding flocks. Birds used open woods adjacent to restored prairie for nesting.
    - In the vital rates table, note that Klamath had higher rates of weather-related nest failure than other regions due to high elevations and snowfall as late as June.

2025 OVSP Ecoregional Research Summary

Parameter	Method	Region	Years	Sample Size
Productivity, Fecundity, Nest Success	Nest Monitoring	Puget	2017-2025	165 nests
		Willamette	2016-2025	307 nests
		Klamath	2018-2019, 2021, 2023	142 nests
Survival, Dispersal, Recruitment	Color-Banding	Puget	2017-2025	299 banded birds; adult (n=73), HY (n=15), nestling (n=211)
		Willamette	2017-2025	940 banded birds; adult (n=401), HY (n=72), nestling (n=467)
		Klamath	2018-2025 (very limited new banding in 2024 and none in 2025, but resighting occurred)	460 banded birds; adult (n=193), nestling (n=267)
Habitat Assessment, Nest Site Selection	Nest Vegetation Monitoring	Puget	2017-2025 (10m point-intercept transects)	131 (with paired random)
		Willamette	2017-2019 (10m point-intercept transects); 2017-2019, 2021-2023 (1m nest plots)	92 1m nest plots (with paired random)
		Klamath	2018, 2019, 2021, 2023 (10m point-intercept transects and 1m nest plots)	142 nests (116 with paired random)
Migration Routes, Wintering Sites	GPS-Tagging Adults	Willamette	2022-2023, 2025-2026 (including return years)	Data retrieved from 2 males (7 new tags deployed in 2025)
		Klamath	2020-2023, 2024-2025 (including return years)	Data retrieved from 8 males
Population Establishment	Conspecific Attraction	Puget	2022-2025	5 sites
		Willamette	2020-2021	5 sites
Fledgling Habitat Use, Survival, Natal Dispersal	Motus-Tagging Fledglings	Klamath	2021-2023	36 late-stage nestlings or fledglings tagged

Vital Rates	Nest Success	Predation Rate	Egg Hatch Rate	Fledgling per Nest	Adult Return Rate	First-Year Return Rate	Site Fidelity
Puget	Apparent = 55.8% (n=165)	90.5% (n=63)	83% (66 nests)	3.1/success (n=92); 1.7/active (n=165)	70.5% (n=68)	17.6% (n=176)	NA
Willamette	Apparent = 50.8 (n=307)	71.8% (n=112)	86.0% (n=442 eggs)	3.1/success (n=150); 1.5/active (n=307)	62.8% (n=713)	Nestling 31.1% (n=128); HY 46.4% (n=26)	Adults = 93.3%; First-Year = 85.9%
Klamath	Apparent = 57.7% (n=142); Modeled = 48.4% (range 35.4% – 76.6%)	63.3% (n=60)	92.9% (n=92)	3.1/success (n=80); 1.8/active (n=140)	49.8% (n=225); Modeled apparent survival 56.4% (n=87)	8.5% (n=234)	NA

Ecostudies Institute Updates – Stephanie Augustine and Gary Slater (ESI)

South Puget Sound

Population Monitoring: Joint Base Lewis-McChord

Since 2015, Ecostudies staff has coordinated standardized line transect surveys for breeding birds across prairie habitat on Joint Base Lewis-McChord as part of the requirements for streaked horned lark conservation and monitoring. We completed 2,924 surveys of 115 unique transects, and used the 463 detections of Oregon vesper sparrows on these surveys in a distance sampling modeling framework to estimate annual population size on occupied sites. Within our sampling area, which doesn't include the center of the Artillery Impact Area, we estimated there were 85 (95% confidence interval: 42 – 176) Oregon vesper sparrows on base in the 2024 breeding season. We observed evidence of a potential overall decline through time in the Artillery Impact Area, the site which hosts the largest population in the South Puget Sound; the population trend for the Weirs Prairie population appeared stable. In 2025, we conducted an additional 297 surveys of 99 transects and detected 55 Oregon vesper sparrows; these data will be used to update the distance sampling model.

Population Monitoring: Off-base surveys

Ecostudies staff has surveyed South Puget Sound prairie sites for Oregon vesper sparrows through several projects since 2015. Surveys in 2018-2019 were the most intensive, and used conspecific playback along transects at sites that were historically occupied or were the recipient of prairie enhancement activities. Sites were managed by a variety of public and private entities and included: Cavness, Deschutes Prairie, Glacial Heritage Preserve, Scatter Creek Wildlife Management Area, Tenalquot Preserve and adjacent pastureland, Violet Prairie-Scatter Creek Preserve, West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Management Area, Wolf Haven, Sanderson Airfield, and Olympia Airfield. Of these sites, we detected one pair at Sanderson airfield in both years, and 1-5 pairs at Tenalquot and adjacent pasturelands. Tenalquot is adjacent to the Weirs Prairies on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, which supports the second largest known population of Oregon vesper sparrows in the South Puget Sound and has continued to host a handful of pairs up to 2025. Additional bird monitoring of grassland sites in the South Puget Sound has continued in concert with other projects (e.g., see conspecific attraction), including 2023-2025 surveys at Mima Mounds and Glacial Heritage Preserve; none of these surveys have encountered new Oregon vesper sparrows in the region. Most work was funded by Competitive State Wildlife Grants.

Demographic Monitoring: Joint Base Lewis-McChord

Since 2016, Ecostudies staff has been conducting demographic monitoring of Oregon vesper sparrow populations to understand limiting factors and help inform recovery actions. Most work occurred on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, focusing on the Weirs Prairie (and adjacent Tenalquot Prairie) due to access limitations to the other JBLM population in the Artillery Impact Area. During 2025, we located and monitored 24 breeding territories (up from 16 in 2024) at the Weirs Prairie and located 25 nests, of which 17 fledged at least one nestling. We also assisted in monitoring 15 pairs in Range 76 and the Artillery Impact Area, where we located 20 nests of which 12 fledged at least one nestling. Modeled nest success probability between 2017-2024 was 0.267 (95% credible interval: 0.166 – 0.385). Nest survival and productivity models incorporating multiple years and additional factors such as nest vegetation will be part of a forthcoming analysis. We used 2016-2024 color-banding and resight data to model annual apparent survival; adults at 0.615 (0.527 – 0.699) were more than double juveniles at 0.207 (0.138 – 0.285) but is confounded by lack of data regarding dispersal to other sites. While we have too few confirmed female records to estimate sex-specific survival, in 2023 we began collecting feather samples from banded nestlings, which will enable us to estimate sex and age-specific survival probabilities in the future. This work has been supported with funds from American Bird Conservancy, DoD-JBLM, USFWS, WDFW, and Wildlife Forever Fund.

Conspecific Attraction

Conspecific attraction is a process wherein individuals use social cues such as song and calls from other individuals of the same species to assess suitability and quality of habitat. Capitalizing on this natural process using artificial means, e.g., speaker playback of auditory cues, can lead individuals dispersing from existing populations to colonize currently unoccupied sites. During the 2022-2025 breeding seasons, Ecostudies

established conspecific attraction playback sites on conservation lands in the South Puget Sound with apparently suitable habitat that are unoccupied by breeding Oregon vesper sparrows. Sites were selected within 20 miles of existing populations, with some sites having historical detections of birds during the breeding or migration seasons. We established playback at Mazama Meadows Conservation Bank and Deschutes Prairie in 2022, Glacial Heritage Preserve and Scatter Creek Wildlife Management Area in 2023, and Scatter Creek Wildlife Management Area and West Rocky Prairie in 2024 and 2025. Playback stations were deployed in early April to coincide with arrival of territorial males and were visited weekly or biweekly throughout the duration of the breeding season and intensively searched for birds. No individuals were detected during the monitoring period. This work is funded by the American Bird Conservancy, the Wildlife Forever Fund, and a Competitive State Wildlife Grant.

Willamette Valley

Creswell Oaks Preserve

The Creswell Oaks property, protected with a conservation easement, is an active cattle ranch where grazing is a central economic and ecological activity. The site supports the largest known Oregon vesper sparrow population in the Willamette Valley Ecoregion and the sparrow is a conservation target of the Creswell Oaks Land Management Plan. Oregon vesper sparrows have been monitored since 2021 with the goal of maintaining or increasing the population within five years. We completed 315 surveys of 21 transects over five years. We used singing male Oregon vesper sparrow detections in a distance sampling framework to estimate annual population density and abundance. Model estimates indicate a potential population decline from 35 (95% confidence interval 22 – 56) male Oregon vesper sparrows in 2021 to only 14 (5 – 39) in 2024. Updated analysis including 2025 data is forthcoming. This project contributes to a foundation of data for tracking population trends of Oregon vesper sparrows and evaluating the effects of management on its abundance and distribution at Creswell Oaks.

Klamath Bird Observatory Updates – Sarah Rockwell (KBO)

- In field season 2025, we conducted resighting at our main study site at Lily Glen County Park, and recaptured two GPS-tagged males.
- We are nearly done drafting a manuscript describing the GPS-tagging results for publication in a journal (co-authors Sarah, Jaime, and Bob); data from 2 new males just added. Should be submitted by end of year (report to USFWS by end of Oct).
- We have yet to detect a Motus-tagged fledgling away from its natal site in a subsequent year (although we haven't tagged any new birds since 2023). One tagged at Upper Vesper Meadow in 2021 was detected the following year at Lower Vesper Meadow by the main Motus station. One Motus-tagged fledgling from a nest at Vesper Meadow in 2023 was resighted at Lily Glen later that fall in the post-breeding period. Only three nestlings banded at Lily Glen or Vesper Meadow have ever been detected at a site other than their natal site in a subsequent year. One was a nestling color-banded at Lily Glen in 2018 that was seen incidentally at Stumpy Knoll in 2019, one was color-banded and Motus-tagged as a nestling at Vesper Meadow in 2022 and resighted at Lily Glen in fall 2023 (possibly without the tag attached), and one was color-banded as a nestling at Vesper Meadow in 2023 and resighted at Lily Glen in summer 2025.
- We received notification of grant approval for additional GPS-tagging in the Klamath Mtns (Rogue Basin and Umpqua) in 2026. The grant also includes some abundance surveys in the Umpqua, at least at North Bank Habitat Management Area and Kanipe Park.
- Klamath Bird Observatory, Willamette Valley/American Bird Conservancy, and Ecostudies Institute are continuing to work together on range-wide analyses of nest success, nest site selection, and annual survival through 2026. Survival report coming together, and will be submitted to USFWS at the end of Oct.

- Presentation: Range-wide survival of the imperiled Oregon vesper sparrow
    - Winter weather effects, rather than direct effects, impact rangewide survival; could be due to pinch points during migration. Higher impact on males could be a result of earlier migration.
    - Weather effects were mostly driven by one extreme year.
- Presentation: First GPS-tracking of the imperiled Oregon vesper sparrow
    - 49 tags deployed through 2025; overall return rate was 38%, retrieval rate was 24%

- Stops within 1500 m counted as the same stop
- Departures occurred between ~Sept 19 and Oct 2
- Results currently in review at Journal of Ornithology

Bald Hill Farm Updates – Bob Altman (Avifauna Northwest)

Overview

Oregon Vesper Sparrow population monitoring at Bald Hill Farm was initiated with territory-mapping in 2014 and 2015. Intensive demographic monitoring has been conducted from 2016-2025 using color-banding of birds and nest monitoring to evaluate metrics of survival, productivity, and dispersal. Habitat assessment at nest plots and control plots was conducted in 2018-2023. Attachment of archival tags to birds occurred in 2022 and 2025 to document migratory routes and wintering locations.

Color-banding

There were 44 birds color-banded in 2025. With nearly all the adult population already banded, there were only two newly banded adult birds (both females). Additionally, there were 42 nestlings banded that successfully fledged.

Productivity

There were 22 nests located and monitored in 2025, the highest amount since initiation of the project. Thirteen were successful for an apparent nest success of 59.1% (9-year mean 46.8%). The Mayfield estimate of nest success (corrects for biases of number of observation days) was 47.3% (9-year mean 29.9%). These were the highest annual estimates of nest success since the project started. The mean number of nestlings fledged was 3.3 per successful nest (9-year mean 3.1 per successful nest).

Survivorship

Adult male overwinter apparent survival estimates (i.e., return rates) from 2024 to 2025 were 70.0% (9-year mean 66.7%). Adult female survival estimates were 44.4% (9-year mean 58.7%). Survival of first-year birds (includes birds banded as nestlings and birds banded as juveniles) was 20.0% (9-year mean 27.4%). Post-fledging survival to independence (i.e., 3-weeks post-fledging) at the two sites where this was monitored was 66.7% (8-year mean 62.8%).

Dispersal

During the nesting season in 2025, there were four individual emigrants from Bald Hill Farm to other sites and four individual immigrants to Bald Hill Farm. Both emigration and immigration included two within-season events and two between-season events. This included an 8+ year-old male that emigrated from Bald Hill Farm to a site approximately two miles away on its return from migration, and when it did not find a mate there it immigrated back to Bald Hill Farm where it mated and nested.

Population Size

There were 12-13 nesting pairs on Bald Hill Farm in 2025. This was one pair lower than 2024, but higher than 2023 (9-10 pairs), which was the lowest during the 10 years of population monitoring.

GPS Tagging

Archival GPS tagging of adult birds at Bald Hill Farm was initiated in 2022 (five males and one female) and repeated in 2025 (3 males). The GPS units on birds tagged in 2025 have a much greater data capacity and will record locations daily throughout the wintering period and migrations.

Habitat Management

Two noteworthy habitat management activities will be occurring in fall 2025. Volunteers will work with Greenbelt staff to thin shrub cover in one portion of the pasture where shrub encroachment has rendered the habitat less suitable for vespers. This area has had the highest density of territories and nests until the last couple years. In 2025, there were no nests in this area. Additionally, there will be a prescribed burn of

approximately 25 acres in part of the prairie restoration fields. This will be the first burn on the site, and it is being done to enhance prairie diversity and support conservation of Taylor's Checkerspot butterfly.

Willamette Valley Metapopulation Updates – Bob Altman (Avifauna Northwest)

Overview

Oregon Vesper Sparrow population monitoring at the Corvallis metapopulation has been conducted at approximately 12 sites for the last 10 years (2016-2025) using color-banding of birds and nest monitoring to evaluate demographic metrics of survival, productivity, and dispersal. Attachment of archival tags to birds occurred in 2022 (13 males, 1 female) and 2025 (7 males) to document migratory routes and wintering locations.

Color-banding

There were 91 birds color-banded in 2025. With much of the adult population already banded, this included 21 adults (12 males, 5 females, and 4 unknown) and 70 hatch-year birds (60 nestlings that successfully fledged and 10 juveniles).

Productivity

There were 32 nests located in 2025. Eighteen were successful with an apparent nest success of 56.3% (9-year mean 49.2%). The Mayfield estimate of nest success (corrects for biases of number of observation days) was 40.4% (9-year mean 28.3%). The mean number of nestlings fledged was 3.2 per successful nest (9-year mean 3.1 per successful nest).

Survivorship

Adult male overwinter apparent survival estimates (i.e., return rates) from 2024 to 2025 were 63.0% (9-year mean 65.3%). Adult female survival estimates were 42.9% (9-year mean 56.4%). Survival of first-year birds (includes birds banded as nestlings and birds banded as juveniles) was 25.5% (9-year mean 34.7%). Post-fledging survival to independence (i.e., 3-weeks post-fledging) was 66.7% (8-year mean 67.9%).

Dispersal

During the nesting season in 2025, there were 10 dispersal events (4 between-season and 6 within-season). This included 3 between-season natal dispersal events and 3 within-season post-fledging dispersal events. It also included an 8+ year-old male that emigrated from Bald Hill Farm to a site approximately two miles away on its return from migration, and when it did not find a mate there it immigrated back to Bald Hill Farm where it mated and nested.

Population Size

The metapopulation estimate was 114 pairs, which is the lowest since the study began. The last three years have been the three lowest years, and all but one of the six sites with the largest populations has declined from highs of 20+ pairs to <15 pairs including one site down to three pairs.

GPS Tagging

Archival GPS tagging of adult birds was initiated in 2022 (13 males and 1 female) and repeated in 2025 (7 males). The GPS units on birds tagged in 2025 have a much greater data capacity and will be record locations daily throughout the wintering period and migrations.

- Presentation: Oregon vesper sparrow metapopulation, Corvallis, OR
    - OVSP in the WV occur in the foothills of the western edge of the main valley, west of Corvallis.
    - Population size: only one site (large, 2000 acres) with increasing population size, but could reflect increased coverage/access to site rather than real population increase.
    - Juvenile survival is highest in first clutches.
    - Given solid demographic, population declines remain a bit of a mystery.
    - Q&A/Discussion:

- Andy: In terms of stochasticity, ranchers are experiencing all kinds of new things annually, but not always the same, so it's hard to account for in modeling. The future of funding is also uncertain.
    - Scott: Funding is bad in WA, with dispersal being the trickiest to fund.
    - Joel: eBird data can help get at the dispersal question.

ACTION PLAN REVIEW & DISCUSSION

- Plan: Review the recovery actions and activities, evaluate their current status, and discuss upcoming plans and projects.
- Actions in gray not actively discussed.

Recovery Action 1. Determine Population Status, Trends, and Current Distribution

1.1 Monitor the rangewide population, tracking trends and distribution.

- Christa: Note that there are differences between regions in survey protocols.
- Gary: For South Puget Sound, we already have an effective protocol to estimate density on occupied sites.
- Christa: The current protocol for unknown site status includes playback presence surveys. Would need to brainstorm how to incorporate into multilevel survey effort.
- Sarah: Only one year of attempted estimated abundance at Rogue Basin. No trend data, no annual surveys of suitable habitat. The effort is intensive and funding is an issue. Lacking population size and trend data in Rogue Basin.
- Bob: Vast majority of birds are on private lands (Christmas tree farms, pasturelands), so outside of sites with existing intensive monitoring, access is an issue. Unliked larks which can be sampled roadside, OVSP cannot/need access to sites.
- Gary: Could be worth creating sublines about regional protocols in this section to tackle objectives in smaller pieces. Develop a multi-level strategy and approach. Sub-activities can prioritize WV/Rogue Basin.
- Christa: Identifying important nonbreeding sites is ongoing with GPS tracking efforts.
- Sarah: WV birds will be returning for recapture in 2026; plans to tag birds in 2027. The goal is 16 tags equally beween Umpqua and Rogue Basin.
- Gary: Identifying important sites is a critical need.
- Jaime: Not many folks currently doing long-term banding.
- **Action:** Stephanie will contact universities doing bird work that is not MAPS.
- Kris: Need to start building a network of partners in CA (Sutter Butte area referenced by Joel) and bringing them into the WG.
    - Joel: Sutter Butte site is not currently conducting bird research. Most of the area is private ranch land. The state of CA bought some land for a state park, though surrounding ranchers were against it and there is no public easement. Access might be arranged with the help of a private nonprofit (middlemountainhikes.org) that has permission from ranchers, including for the Peace Valley Audubon Christmas Bird Count.
    - Hornitos Ranch belongs to the Sierra Foothill Conservancy; tracked OVSP spent whole winter on ranch they acquired. Joel is currently working on contacting their stewardship coordinator, Lauren Miller. Good avenue, but the challenge would be getting people down there.
- **Action:** Kris will share most recent USFWS KBO reports (GPS and survival).
- Bob: Inability to separate out subspecies on wintering grounds is a challenge. Need to increase tagging efforts.
    - Joel: Consider color-banding in Umpqua
    - Sarah: Rogue Basin has at most 10% of its population banded in any given year; currently it is much less.

Recovery Action 2. Conserve and Enhance Populations

2.1 Implement conservation programs that enhance vital rates on occupied site (i.e. improve population growth rate).

- Gary: In the South Sound, habitat restoration is occurring across both JBLM and conservation lands throughout the region. On non-JBLM sites, agencies are working to get credit through HCPs and PBO. Site management plans are required as part of the process. DoD/REPI looking to acquire lands (big priority).
- Christa: WDFW has included OVSP habitat metrics in the Scatter Creek Wildlife Management Plan.

2.2 Identify conservation programs that enhance habitat suitability of unoccupied sites.
- Christa: Habitat suitability criteria were included in the 2022 landowner guide created by Bob, Sarah, and others.
- Bob: Intent was to provide a baseline for the OVSP range, but partners will need to refine to specifically address criteria for their region. Habitat requirements and target objectives for the full range need to be reevaluated/updated.
- Sarah: Some aspects of the document are broken up by region, others aren't.
- Gary: We have breeding habitat suitability criteria will always try to improve upon in. Encompasses a broad suite of sites. Likely already have what we need to replicate the lark habitat summary but for OVSP.

2.3 Identify and conserve current and potentially suitable sites.
- Sarah: OVSP habitat less degraded by non-natives species; no current plans to purchase more.
- Gary: Ongoing activity in the South Sound where there are regulatory measures in place to protect OVSP. If the species is listed, this activity will become more important and possible.
- Zach: Conservation Benefit Agreements (CBAs; previously Safe Harbor Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances) are a good tool for OVSP, regardless of listing status.

Recovery Action 3. Identify Limiting Factors and Develop Solutions

3.1 Conduct research on threats to population viability.
- Gary: Research on vital rates is a key ongoing activity/subject of the reports that will be released soon.
- Bob: No current info on source-sink dynamics in the WV. Have factors to calculate lambda and conduct sensitivity analyses; according to Bob's presentation, vital rates suggest that population shouldn't be declining but still is. High priority.
- Gary: How were SSA models parameterized? Was a sensitivity analysis used?
    - Kris: In appendix of the SSA; can have conversations with Robin and Judy when the document goes out for public review and assess that question then.
    - Sarah: Modelled lambda by region.
- Gary: Consider splitting activity 3.1.1 into separate items; research activities are at different levels of completion.
- Bob: We have substantial robust data, but would benefit from a more fine-scale assessment of what's going on in the WV.
- Anita: Consider a follow-up discussion for identifying/prioritizing research areas?
    - Christa: Funding tends to be opportunistic.

3.2 Develop tools to protect and enhance populations, create new populations, and expand the distribution of OVSP.
- Gary: SPS is the most likely choice for reintroduction/translocation; lark can act as the surrogate for any OVSP efforts. Can track outcomes from the lark efforts as a first step. Small population size means that we would need to be more careful.
- Bob: Consider prioritizing actions by ecoregion, as different stressors lead to different options for actions.

3.3 Develop tools to enhance habitat and OVSP survival and reproduction.
- Bob: Developing a list of practices to protect OVSP during the breeding season on agricultural lands is always a challenge, especially in the WV. Different from larks and different across various agricultural lands (Christmas tree farms vs grass seed fields). Feels less like a priority to integrate conservation actions on economically driven lands when there are options elsewhere. Difficulty in accomplishing on working lands.

3.4 Develop a Conservation Benefit Agreement (CBA) to promote OVSP habitat creation on private agricultural lands.

- Bob: How would a CBA work with agricultural lands?
    - Kris: Agricultural-specific language is a carryover from larks; could generalize to include Christmas tree farms, etc.
- Zach: CBAs/SHAs exist for many species; in these agreements, the landowner can be afforded assurances (exemptions from the ESA Section 9 take prohibition) for activities that are already ongoing so long as the total impact of all of their activities is a net conservation benefit for the covered species.
- Gary: Could also apply to grazing operations.
- Zach: The key to a successful CBA is not changing what the landowner does (unless necessary to achieve a net conservation benefit); develop relationships with the landowners, allow for surveying and monitoring, and provide opportunities for if the landowner no longer wants to be involved (also known as "return to baseline").

3.5 Develop a mitigation strategy for offsetting the effects of non-federal development in occupied OVSP habitats.

3.6 Develop strategies to integrate OVSP conservation into landscapes managed for the recovery of other rare prairie and grassland species in the range of OVSP.
- Low priority; currently an uphill battle.

3.7 Develop other strategies necessary to address factors affecting OVSP and their habitat.

Recovery Action 4. Promote Outreach and Cooperation with Interested Parties, Rights Holders, and Partner Agencies

4.1 Facilitate coordination and information sharing.
4.2 Develop outreach and education materials.