



## USDA and DOI Highlight Successes of Protecting Bird Habitat on Private Lands

**WASHINGTON, July 2, 2013** -- Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Interior Secretary Sally Jewell today announced the release of the *State of the Birds 2013 Report on Private Lands*. A collaborative effort as part of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative, involving federal and state wildlife agencies and scientific and conservation organizations, the report shows how private land conservation incentives positively impact bird habitat.

“Sixty percent of U.S. land is in private hands, making the efforts of farmers, ranchers and landowners critical when it comes to creating, restoring and protecting bird habitat,” Secretary Vilsack said. “Today’s report highlights the positive impact of voluntary conservation measures for birds, including those made possible by Farm Bill programs. The need for a long-term commitment to conservation is just one more good reason why we need Congressional passage of a multi-year Food, Farm and Jobs Bill as soon as possible.”

Individuals, families, organizations and corporations, including two million ranchers and farmers and about 10 million woodland owners, own and manage 1.43 billion acres, roughly 60 percent of the land area of the United States. Private lands are used by virtually all of the terrestrial and coastal birds of the United States, 251 of which are federally threatened, endangered or of conservation concern. Many privately owned working lands that produce a bounty of food, timber, and other resources for society also provide valuable habitat for birds.

“Our nation’s most effective conservation efforts are partnerships in which federal, state and local governments work hand-in-hand with private landowners and other stakeholders,” said Secretary Jewell. “The programs highlighted in this report help build these voluntary partnerships to conserve the vital habitat of our many bird species. In addition, many of these partnerships provide direct benefits to people such as improving water quality and supporting jobs and economic growth.”

*The State of the Birds 2013 Report on Private Lands* shows that private lands have critical conservation value, and that landowners and managers can measure their yield not only in bushels and head and cords, but also in bluebirds, hawks and canvasbacks.

The success stories highlighted in this report demonstrate that these voluntary efforts on private lands are resulting in meaningful bird conservation results:

- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):** Henslow’s Sparrow populations, which have declined more than 95 percent since the mid-1960s, have rebounded in areas through CRP. In Illinois, regional Henslow’s Sparrow spring bird counts are now about 25 times greater than 30 years ago, prior to CRP. The Illinois counties with the highest percentage

of CRP acreage also have the highest Henslow's Sparrow population gains. A recent study in the Dakotas suggested that if CRP acres were put back into annual crop production, populations of several species of grassland birds (including Sedge Wren, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink and Western Meadowlark) would experience significant population declines, ranging up to 56 percent.

- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP):** The Wetland Reserve Program has restored 2.6 million acres of private wetlands across the nation. WRP-conserved wetlands provide essential breeding habitat for waterbirds such as Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser, wintering habitat for 3.5 to 4.5 million waterfowl every winter; and migratory stopover habitat for shorebirds such as Black-necked Stilt and Greater Yellowlegs.
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service Landscape Conservation Initiatives:** The Sage Grouse Initiative has targeted Farm Bill conservation funding to enroll more than 700 ranchers and implement sustainable grazing systems that improve habitat on more than 2 million acres in 11 western states. The Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative, delivered through various Farm Bill conservation programs, is providing inland habitats for migratory waterbirds on more than 470,000 acres of private lands in eight states from Florida and Georgia to Texas and Missouri.
- **Chippewa Flowage Forest Conservation Easement:** This Forest Legacy project—a partnership of the Forest Legacy Program, Wisconsin Bureau of Forest Management and Trust for Public Land—created an 18,000 acre conservation easement of forest, wetlands, and exceptional wildlife habitat especially important for forest birds like Wood Thrush, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Black-throated Green warbler, and water birds like the Bald Eagle, Osprey and Common Loon.
- **Machias River Project:** This project in Maine is a good example of conservation easements protecting the futures of both birds and working forests. This Forest Legacy project—a partnership of the Forest Legacy Program, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, The Nature Conservancy Maine Chapter, and others—protected 60,000 acres through fee purchase and easements. These acres connect to over 340,000 acres of other protected lands, creating a mega block of contiguous habitat for 28 bird species of conservation concern.
- **Foresters for the Birds: Helping Landowners Integrate Timber and Forest Bird Habitat Management--**This project, with financial support from the USDA Forest Service, is a partnership between the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and Audubon Vermont. Audubon biologists and over 100 foresters in Vermont and the surrounding region have begun working together to help landowners integrate timber and songbird habitat management.

The full *State of the Birds 2013 Report on Private Lands* is available at [www.stateofthebirds.org](http://www.stateofthebirds.org). For more information about USDA's many conservation programs visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).