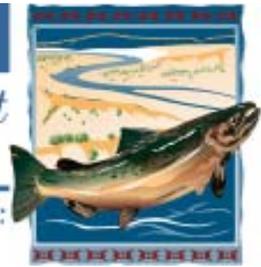


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*Hanford Reach National Monument
Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge*

... protecting the last of the free-flowing Columbia River.

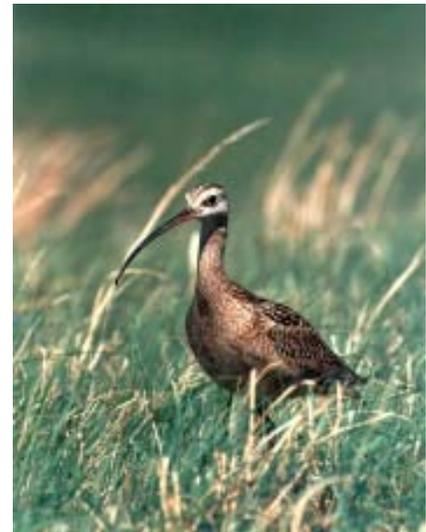


April 26, 2005

Long-billed Curlew Monitoring Surveys for 2005 Completed

The Long-billed curlew is identified as the highest priority breeding shorebird for the Hanford Reach National Monument/Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge (Monument). Curlews nest in shrub-steppe habitat characterized by native grasses with scattered shrubs, and in formerly disturbed areas (i.e. old agricultural fields) now dominated by cheatgrass. This year, the refuge implemented a modified version of the Long-billed curlew range-wide monitoring protocol to establish base-line data on the Monument for this species. The survey protocols were designed to improve understanding of local curlew breeding populations, their habitat associations, their trends, and to better meet the objectives and purposes of the Monument.

The objectives of the Monument Long-billed curlew survey are: 1) to develop local population estimates of Long-billed curlews, 2) to determine habitat relationships of breeding Long-billed curlews, 3) to develop long-term trends of local curlew populations, 4) to develop maps of curlew breeding areas and habitats to facilitate future management decisions, and 5) to provide incidental sighting information of other wildlife species of concern for inclusion in state wildlife and in local federal heritage databases. The Mid-Columbia River Refuge Complex is completing a similar survey for lands that they manage. This coordinated effort will help to define curlew abundance on refuges in SE Washington and NE Oregon.



Monument survey routes are assigned based on geographic information system (GIS) data files of existing drivable roads, vegetation cover types queried to reflect Long-billed curlew habitat requirements, and local and landscape slope measurements. "Survey routes" as they are defined in these surveys are segments of existing roads that either have a significant portion of their length passing through potential Long-billed curlew habitat, as determined by GIS classification, or are the closest viable route passing through an area of interest (e.g., through a management unit that only has limited road access. Although all survey points are along roads, a habitat-based GIS data analysis of the survey results should provide the Monument with curlew population estimates by habitat type and management area. The surveys are conducted in the early spring, pre-breeding season when curlews are most "detectable" because they are performing aerial territorial displays. The birds get much more secretive after initiating their nests and once they begin incubation.

Surveys are complete, although analysis has not yet been conducted to determine local breeding population estimates. Biologists completed 13 routes, totaling 163 survey points within the Monument boundaries. Twelve Long-billed curlews were detected during surveys, while 11 birds were detected on the Monument outside of the official survey, for a total of 23 birds. Further analysis will determine if this low number is cause for concern, or whether this is an expected number for this species based on available habitat. Continuing these surveys annually will allow the Monument to improve management and conservation of Long-billed curlews in the future.