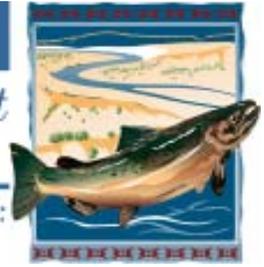


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*Hanford Reach National Monument
Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge*

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



April 6, 2005

Shrub-Steppe Bird Research Continues at Hanford Reach National Monument



The 2005 field season marks the second season of work on a three year study to assess shrub-steppe bird communities and habitat associations on the Hanford Reach National Monument (Monument). The study is a partnership effort between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Birds Office, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Biological Resources Division and Point Reyes Bird Observatory Conservation Science to better characterize avian use of shrub-steppe habitat types and potential response of avian communities to management activities. Funded in part by the USGS Science Support program, the study focuses on upland breeding migratory song birds of the shrub-steppe ecosystem. Specific objectives of the study are to 1) map relative abundances of shrub-steppe birds across the Monument's Saddle Mountain and Wahluke Units; 2) compare species

abundance across five major vegetation cover types; 3) create habitat affiliation models based on vegetation and landscape and 4) establish baseline data for a long-term monitoring program.

The study uses point-count sampling and vegetation measurements that will allow predictions of avian species abundance based on understory and overstory plant composition. Findings will aid in understanding how bird communities differ among cover types and will allow predictions for how this might change with management actions. Developing this baseline data is critical to planning for various management activities while conserving populations of breeding shrub-steppe bird species. The data from this study should allow the Monument to detect trends in abundance of shrub-steppe birds, whether the populations are increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable. Additionally, the information will allow managers to track responses to management actions, for example, how bird communities would respond to a prescribed fire, or to habitat changes due to wildfire. Finally, the data allows for an adaptive management approach to shrub-steppe restoration. This adaptive approach will allow projects to be modified or improved to further conservation of birds on the Monument if the response of bird species is different than expected.

The study is part of the larger Sagebrush Bird Conservation Network (SBCN) (www.sagebrushbird.org), an effort to coordinate and disseminate information related to shrub-steppe bird research in the Intermountain West. The SBCN is committed to the preservation and enhancement of shrub-steppe bird populations and the sagebrush ecosystems they depend on. The goal of the network is to improve coordination among individuals and institutions that conduct research on sagebrush associated birds and provide science based recommendations and decision support tools for land managers. The data collection methods may allow for this study to be used in comparison to other study areas, potentially allowing for conclusions to be applied at a broader scale in the arid west.

