



Laymon, Stephen &lt;stephen\_laymon@fws.gov&gt;

## peer review - Proposed Rule FWS-R8-ES-2013-0011 to designate critical habitat for the western distinct population segment of the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)

1 message

Jay Carlisle <jaycarlisle@boisestate.edu>  
To: Stephen\_Laymon@fws.gov

Mon, Oct 13, 2014 at 6:31 PM

Dr. Laymon

Please accept these comments in regard to the designation of critical habitat for yellow-billed cuckoos. At the outset I want to state that I am not a yellow-billed cuckoo expert, per se. That said, I have over 20 years of experience studying bird communities across Idaho and much of the West, I have direct survey experience with/for cuckoos, and I have learned much about the ecological needs of this species from various sources, including primary literature, conference symposia, and meetings of the Partners in Flight Western Working Group. My CV is attached.

My first comment is in regard to the amount of proposed critical habitat for the yellow-billed cuckoo across the range. I see from the Proposed Rule that this has been considered but if the western distinct population segment is deemed threatened now, and much of the cause is chalked up to lost habitat (*both in extent and quality*), **how can we expect to truly recover the species by only protecting/enhancing areas currently occupied?** For example, in Idaho our limited historical data suggest that the species historically occurred in a much wider range than currently (Taylor 2000, Reynolds and Hinckley 2005, [Idaho Department of Fish and Game 2005](#); *1st 2 attached here*) yet only currently occupied areas are proposed designated. I imagine that it's a similar situation in other states. Even if these 4 proposed designated areas are protected and restored to full function (*unlikely to be possible given development pressure, water management limitations, etc.*), this doesn't seem like a sufficient area to allow for population recovery and expansion. Otherwise I find that the Proposed Rule to contain accurate information about the ecological needs of the species. Thus, my main suggestion is to add critical habitat in Idaho in areas of historical occupancy as well as other areas that hold potentially suitable for cuckoos.

Proposed additional areas of designated critical habitat:

- **lower Big Wood River** (*south/downstream from the already identified Big Wood River area*) - confirmed sighting in June 2009 (*see attached records committee report with coordinates* NAD 83 Lat/long: 43.20163359 -114.33929466 or UTM: 4786643 716165); habitat limited in extent but has the correct structure with understory and overstory
- **Salmon River upstream and downstream from the town of Salmon** - 2+ historic sightings ([Idaho Department of Fish and Game 2005](#)) and apparently suitable habitat structure. Even if this was never documented to be a core breeding area for the species (*hard to definitively say it never was because of the secretive nature of the species*), it has the potential to provide suitable habitat currently and into the future. Especially considering that climate projections could make areas currently at the northern extent of the range more suitable for the species, it seems warranted to include areas that are currently unoccupied but that could provide suitable habitat in the future
- **Deer Flat NWR** - including the riparian habitat along the south and east shore of Lake Lowell and Snake River islands. Historic records and likely historic breeding based on habitat extent and structure. Would likely require habitat management and restoration.
- **Snake River between Blackfoot and Roberts** - to increase population connectivity and the potential for range expansion, I strongly suggest adding this stretch of river to connect the already proposed areas Idaho Snake River 1 and 2 - especially the stretch of habitat between Blackfoot and Shelley. Certainly it won't be possible to restore/protect this entire stretch due to the presence of urban and agricultural areas but any patches of riparian habitat should be added to if possible but certainly protected and managed to

develop the two-tiered habitat structure cuckoos need.

Thanks very much for your attention,

Jay

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Jay Carlisle

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Coordinator, [Idaho Bird Conservation Partnership, IBCP on Facebook](#)

[http://works.bepress.com/jay\\_carlisle/](http://works.bepress.com/jay_carlisle/)

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#### 4 attachments



**Taylor (2000) YBCU Western Birds.pdf**  
53K



**Idaho\_YBCUFinalReport2005.pdf**  
2494K



**YBCU 6-10-09.rtf**  
3955K



**Carlisle CV (10-12-14).doc**  
53K