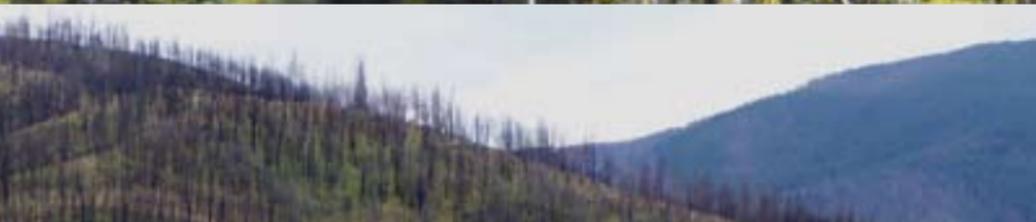




Ponderosa Pine Restoration for Priority Bird Species on Family Forests in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington



American Bird Conservancy, Forests for Watersheds & Wildlife, and the Forest Restoration Partnership are working with private landowners to implement conservation measures in ponderosa pine habitat in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Our cooperative work seeks to help family forest owners restore open, mature stands of ponderosa pine habitat that meet the habitat needs of cavity-nesting bird species of conservation concern, notably the Flammulated Owl, Lewis's Woodpecker, and White-headed Woodpecker.

We are working with landowners with large tracts of ponderosa pine forest to discuss and encourage the implementation of ponderosa pine restoration and conservation measures such as thinning and snag management. Landowners selected to participate in the project work with us to develop a management plan, implement habitat restoration activities to benefit cavity-nesting bird species, and collect on-site data to describe and assess habitat conditions and the presence and habitat suitability for priority bird species.



Priority Cavity-Nesting Birds in Ponderosa Pine Habitat

Flammulated Owl | This tiny owl inhabits montane pine and aspen forests where it feeds almost entirely on insects, especially moths and beetles. Flammulated Owls nest primarily in cavities excavated by woodpeckers in large trees and snags (more than 16 inches in diameter). They consistently select habitat that combines open forest stands with large trees and snags for nesting and foraging, occasional clusters of thick understory vegetation for roosting and calling, and adjacent grassland openings that provide optimum edge habitat for foraging.

Lewis's Woodpecker | The Lewis's Woodpecker is a large woodpecker that will excavate its own cavity in soft wood, but also will use existing cavities and even some nest boxes. It is dependent on open ponderosa pine habitat, preferring sites with large snags. It forages on insect populations and ripe fruits and has a specialized aerial flycatching behavior. They also nest in cottonwoods and in recently burned forests.

White-headed Woodpecker | The White-headed Woodpecker is highly dependent on large tracts of open, mature ponderosa pine forest with dead or dying trees for nesting and large trees for foraging. It excavates nesting cavities in snags and stumps often within 10 feet from the ground. Populations of White-headed woodpeckers have declined in Idaho, Oregon and Washington as the habitat has changed from open pine forest with old trees to younger forests invaded by non-pine tree species and a dense, shrubby understory.

Flammulated Owl (left) | This tiny, insectivorous owl is highly migratory, nesting from May through August, where it prefers open pine forests. Subtly colored and only 6 – 6-1/2 inches long with a 14-inch wingspan, this owl is difficult to view. To hear the call of the Flammulated Owl, go to: www.owling.com/Flammulated.htm

White-headed Woodpecker (right) | The medium-sized White-headed woodpecker is a year-round resident bird and the only North American woodpecker with a black body and a white head. It has white wing patches, visible when it is perching or flying. Adult males have a red patch on the back of their crowns.

Bird Conservation Approaches in Dry Ponderosa Pine Forest Habitat

Dry forests dominated by ponderosa pine, with varying amounts of other coniferous trees, are distributed widely throughout the West at lower elevations, often representing the first forest zone above valley grasslands. Historically, these forests burned at regular intervals of 5-25 years. These fires promoted an open uneven-aged forest dominated by large pines, with open grassy and shrub understories. Because fires were generally of low intensity, more than 70% of the acres of this forest type were stands of large, mature pines as recently as 100 years ago. Logging, habitat conversion, and encroachment of denser fir stands have resulted in a dramatic decrease in the distribution of mature pine stands in the last 50 years. Fire suppression has led to a situation where much denser stands of Douglas-fir have replaced the open stands, making them much more susceptible to crown fires. The extent of recent fires in the West emphasizes the need to restore appropriate structure to ponderosa pine stands. In many areas, efforts are underway to open up stands by removing or thinning the understory and managing for a more open spacing of mature trees. While doing so, we have the opportunity to re-create the conditions needed by declining bird species of concern. This can include protecting and recruiting snags for nesting and maintaining a diverse understory for feeding habitat.

Lewis's Woodpecker | The Lewis's Woodpecker is a medium-sized, uniquely-colored migratory woodpecker of open forests and post-fire habitat. Lewis's Woodpeckers are commonly associated with an open forest canopy, large snags for nesting, and a dense understory shrub layer that produces an abundance of insects, for its unique fly-catching behavior.



Richard Cannings

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Daniel Casey

The Role of Private Lands

Private lands can play a key role in the conservation of ponderosa pine habitats and the birds that depend on them. Over 25% of the ponderosa pine acreage in the "Bird Habitat Conservation Areas" identified by the Intermountain West Joint Venture (a coalition of bird conservation partners) is on private lands and 39% of those acres are in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. These lower-elevation habitats are often interspersed with the grassland and riparian habitats preferred by the Flammulated Owl, Lewis's Woodpecker, and the White-headed Woodpecker.

The American Bird Conservancy and Forests for Watersheds & Wildlife are working together to identify suitable habitats for these species on private lands that can be enhanced through restoration. We are especially interested in properties with significant acreages of ponderosa pine habitat where landowners are interested in participating in bird conservation while meeting their other management objectives.

Snag | Tree snags—dead or downed trees in various states of decay—provide vital habitat for a wide range of birds and other wildlife. In addition to nesting habitat, snags provide food by way of the insects under the bark. Retaining and recruiting snags in forest stands is one of the best ways of ensuring the value of the areas to birds and other wildlife. By some estimates, the removal of dead material from forests can mean a loss of habitat for up to 1/5 of the animals in the ecosystem.



What You Can Do

Reducing the risk of fire through logging and brush removal has become a priority for Western landowners in recent years. Much of this effort to reduce fuel levels on public and private lands is consistent with restoring the habitat structure needed by nesting and foraging bird species of concern. Where Flammulated Owls, Lewis's Woodpeckers, and White-headed Woodpeckers are known or suspected to occur, we encourage family forest owners to take advantage of opportunities to manage ponderosa pine forests using the following recommended strategies:

- ♦ Retain all live ponderosa pine trees/acre over 2.1 inches in diameter, and as many large (greater than 17 inches) live trees as possible;
- ♦ Use thinning and fire to remove invasive trees and restore open but patchy understory conditions;
- ♦ Retain all snags and broken-top trees greater than 9 inches in diameter;
- ♦ Recruit (create) one large snag (greater than 20 inches) per acre, where feasible.

Red Crossbill | This finch species has a crossed bill uniquely adapted for extracting seeds from pine cones. It depends on mature trees with healthy cone crops.



Landowner Assistance Programs

Several programs exist to assist landowners with the management of their forestland. Assistance can take the form of technical expertise and advice in the design and planning for tree thinning and harvest, consultation on site-specific approaches to reducing fire risk, or even financial assistance for fuel reduction and habitat enhancement. Some of these include:

State Forestry Agency | Your state forestry agency can provide technical assistance including help with developing multi-resource management plans and information on any relevant cost-share assistance programs for family forest owners.

Idaho Forestry Assistance Bureau: www.idl.idaho.gov/bureau/forasst.htm

Oregon Department of Forestry: egov.oregon.gov/ODF

Washington Forest Practices Division: www.dnr.wa.gov/forestpractices

Partners for Fish & Wildlife | The Partners program works with private landowners on habitat-based projects that meet the needs of declining species. www.fws.gov/partners

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) | The NRCS can assist with conservation planning and administers a number of habitat-related cost-share and easement programs. www.nrcs.usda.gov

State Wildlife Agency | Your state wildlife agency can provide information on protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats. Some states may have funding available for family forest owners through their State Wildlife Grant funds.

Idaho Fish & Game: www.dfw.state.or.us

Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife: www.dfw.state.or.us

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife: wdfw.wa.gov

Dusky Grouse | This declining gamebird relies on lower elevation open pine and fir stands for nesting and brood-rearing, moving to higher elevation spruce-fir stands in winter.



Bob Martinka

Partners

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to protect wild birds and their habitats in the Western Hemisphere. ABC succeeds by forming partnerships to address the most critical issues in bird conservation, including habitat loss. ABC works to keep common birds common. www.abcbirds.org

Forests for Watersheds & Wildlife (F²W²) is the habitat conservation program of the American Forest Foundation, a non-profit organization. F²W² works with partners and family forest owners to improve riparian habitat and watershed health and conserve and create forest habitat for imperiled wildlife. www.conservationforestry.org

Forest Restoration Partnership is a non-profit organization founded to promote the conservation and restoration of declining forest habitats on private lands in the western United States. We promote this mission through collaborative projects that emphasize the design and implementation of cutting-edge habitat restoration practices and holistic forest management, and education and outreach to promote innovative forest restoration systems. www.forestpartners.org

Restoration of Open Stands |

The restoration of open, mature stands of ponderosa pine through logging and brush removal has become a favored approach to reducing fire risk in the West. When done in a way that preserves and encourages nesting snags, patches of retained denser young trees, and some larger Douglas-fir, these stands can provide much-needed habitat for owls, woodpeckers and other bird species in need.



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For More Information

To learn more about the opportunities for restoring ponderosa pine forests for priority bird species contact:

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Forest Restoration Partnership

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