



For Immediate Release: April 1, 2008
Contact: Debbie.slobe@pljv.org; 303-926-0777

CRP PROVIDES BIG BENEFITS FOR MANY MIXED GRASS BIRDS

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is doing more for some birds than any other conservation practice in the mixed-grass prairie, and loss of CRP would have a drastic impact on regional bird populations. These findings and more are part of a new wildlife [Conservation Effects Assessment Project \(CEAP\)](#) study conducted by the Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to quantify the effects of the CRP on priority birds in the mixed-grass [Bird Conservation Region \(BCR 19\)](#).

“It’s pretty impressive when you look at certain species like Dickcissels. In the mixed grass prairie region of some states, the CRP is supporting a third or a half of the carrying capacity for the species. That is pretty surprising and powerful,” said Charles Rewa, wildlife CEAP coordinator for the USDA [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS).

The CEAP assessment involved analyzing national and regional bird population goals and landscape carrying capacities for 12 priority birds in BCR 19, and determining how much CRP is contributing to those goals. The evaluation found that CRP contributes more than 15% of the population goal for Dickcissels, Grasshopper Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlarks in at least two of the four states assessed, and that the program contributes significantly to population goals for other priority species such as Cassin’s Sparrows, Lark Buntings, Northern Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasants and Western Kingbirds.

PLJV used Geographic Information System (GIS)-based spatial data to place the CRP within the context of other bird habitats. What they found was that not only does CRP provide significant percentages of habitat for many priority birds, but that it also helps create large blocks of grassland habitat important for Lesser Prairie-Chickens.

“CRP on its own wasn’t that important for Lesser Prairie-Chickens, but when you look at contracts adjacent to grasslands, the story changes. Straight CRP coverage provides less than 1% of the goal for Lesser Prairie-Chickens. But with contracts adjacent to grasslands that make up large blocks of habitat, CRP helps provide 6% of the goal. This illustrates the importance of where these enrollments are on the landscape with respect to their wildlife value for some species,” Rewa said.

“Given what we have learned through this CEAP process, we can now target CRP enrollment to nearly recover Lesser Prairie-Chickens,” said PLJV Coordinator Mike Carter.

This study of CRP was the first to quantify the impact of the program on regional bird populations and explicitly answer the question – how many birds does CRP support? PLJV and USDA partners were able to answer this question by calculating the carrying capacity of CRP for priority birds in the study area, and comparing those numbers to national and regional population goals. This was done using the PLJV’s [Hierarchical All-Bird Conservation System database](#).

“Not only were we able to assess the effects of CRP for bird species, but also put it in the context of population objectives. If the goal is to double the population for a species and you find out that 20% is supported by CRP, that is a pretty important piece of the landscape,” Rewa said.

This study was a joint effort between the PLJV, Great Plains GIS Partnership, NRCS and the Farm Service Agency, and plans are in the works to conduct another CEAP project to assess the impact of CRP on priority birds in the shortgrass prairie [Bird Conservation Region \(BCR 18\)](#).

“This project is a good example of how productive partnerships work. The USDA had the need to assess CRP, and the PLJV and Great Plains GIS Partnership had the tools and mutual interest to put a project together that is technically sound and produced useful outputs,” Rewa said.

The USDA will use the results to help improve how the agency operates in the field, and is currently working on a blueprint for putting all CEAP project findings into practice. NRCS will also soon release a Conservation Insight related to this project.

“In addition to evaluating the past, the project gives us good insight on how to do better for bird populations in the future,” Carter said.

The full CEAP project report can be downloaded from the [PLJV website](#). Also, you can listen to a recent Playa Country Radio interview with PLJV GIS Analyst [Megan McLachlan](#) about the project.

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture is a partnership of federal and state wildlife and natural resource agencies, national, state and local conservation groups, corporations and individuals dedicated to conserving bird habitat in the Southern Great Plains. For more information, visit the PLJV website: www.pljv.org.

###