

WCS study on birds and streams included in federal guidelines to safeguard waterways

August 18 2009

The results of a Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) study that rapidly measures stream habitat have been adopted by a government agency working with private landowners to restore waterways throughout the U.S.

The results of the study, which assess the relationship between streamside vegetation and migratory songbirds, are being used by the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS works with landowners on restoring and protecting the literally million of miles of streams that flow through private lands.

The study is by Hilary Cooke and Dr. Steve Zack of the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) and appears in the July issue of the journal *Environmental Management*.

The study, which looked at riparian area in semi-arid eastern Oregon, examined two simple and quick vegetation measurements: the average height and width of woody vegetation such as willows along a flood plain. The results showed that increases in woody vegetation led to a greater diversity and abundance of riparian birds including yellow warblers, song sparrows and yellow-breasted chats.

"Riparian habitat is critical for birds particularly in semi-arid regions of the west, and working with landowners to increase their streamside woody vegetation is an important conservation tool for declining bird

populations," said Cooke who is finishing her Ph.D. at the University of Alberta.

The results of the study provide federal managers and private ranchers with an efficient tool for estimating the value of their streams as bird habitat, according to the authors. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has added these simple measurements to their revised protocol for assessing riparian habitat with private landowners across the nation.

"We feel that adding this wildlife component to our stream assessments will help ensure that both streams and riparian habitats can function better on private lands," said Kathryn Boyer, Fisheries Biologist for the NRCS who oversees many projects working with private landowners throughout the west.

"We undertook these studies to help inform riparian management and wildlife conservation," said Zack. "We think such assessments can represent a 'win-win' for private landowners wanting to restore their streams and for encouraging the creation of more in-stream habitat for fish and habitat important for declining migratory birds. We are very happy that our work is being adopted by the NRCS, who can help implement widespread conservation of fish and wildlife working with private landowners."

The Wildlife Conservation Society is building upon this work to better inform how to conserve of riparian systems and wildlife habitat.

"As riparian habitat is the most degraded, but most important, habitat in the West, it is imperative to find workable ways to restore our watersheds to ensure that they function to store water, hold soils, and provide habitat to wildlife," said Zack.

Source: Wildlife Conservation Society ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: WCS study on birds and streams included in federal guidelines to safeguard waterways (2009, August 18) retrieved 18 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-08-wcs-birds-streams-federal-guidelines.html>

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