

Department of Defense (DoD)



Mission: To ensure that all military departments have access to the land, sea, and air resources necessary to ensure realistic testing and training.

DoD Lands at a Glance

- Although DoD manages less than 5% of public lands, these 30 million acres are crucial to the long-term health of bird populations.
- DoD lands support more endangered and imperiled plant and animal species per acre than any other federal agency.
- Because most DoD lands were acquired before modern urban growth, these lands now represent the largest blocks of remaining bird habitats in many rapidly developing landscapes.
- DoD manages some of the highest quality bird habitat in eastern grasslands, California coastal sage, and long-leaf pine and Mexican pine-oak forests.



COURTESY OF U.S. ARMY, FORT RILEY

Fort Riley (Kansas) manages the largest block of contiguous tallgrass prairie under single ownership—50,000 acres maintained by fires from military training and prescribed burns.

Stewardship of Birds

- Reestablishment and maintenance of open longleaf pine forests has benefited the endangered **Red-cockaded Woodpecker**, **Bachman's Sparrow**, **Brown-headed Nuthatch**, and other species.
- DoD lands are disproportionately important to southwestern pine-oak forest birds, including **Buff-breasted** and **Sulfur-bellied flycatchers**, **Elegant Trogon**, and **Berylline Hummingbird**.
- Army bases provide significant expanses of unbroken habitat crucial to area-sensitive grassland and prairie species, such as breeding **Henslow's Sparrow** and wintering **longspurs**.
- **Le Conte's** and **Crissal thrashers** thrive on DoD aridlands, which also provide vast expanses of wintering habitat for shrub-scrub species such as **Sage** and **Black-throated sparrows**. DoD lands such as Camp Pendleton support nearly half of all threatened **California Gnatcatchers** found on public lands.
- Beach-nesting species, including about 50% of the endangered **California Least Tern** population, use undeveloped beaches in southern California that are found largely on DoD lands.

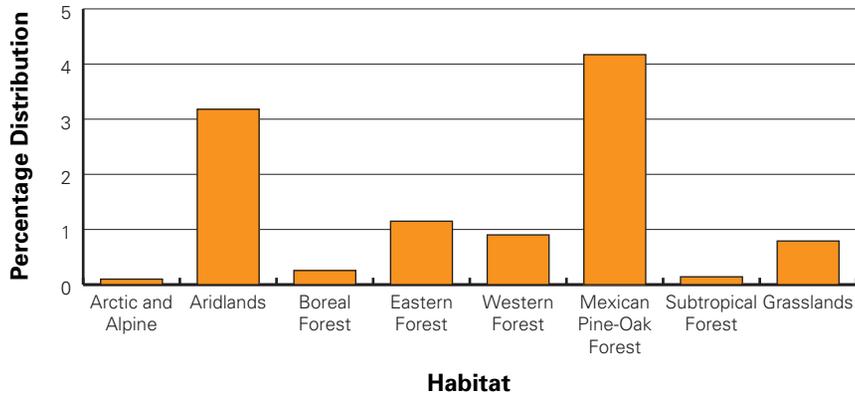


TOP TO BOTTOM: BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH BY GREG LAVATY, BUFF-BREASTED FLYCATCHER BY CHRIS WOOD, HENSLOW'S SPARROW BY GREG LAVATY, LE CONTE'S THRASHER BY BRIAN SULLIVAN



CHRIS EBERLY

Distribution of Birds on DoD Lands



Percentage distribution of breeding bird species dependent on each habitat on DoD lands.

DoD and Bird Conservation

The Sikes Act requires the development and implementation of Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans for military installations. Prepared in cooperation with USFWS and state fish and wildlife agencies, these plans integrate natural resources programs with military operations, training, and other programs such as master planning and cultural resources management.

DoD resource managers must balance their “compliance” mandate for listed species with the opportunity to help species with high stewardship potential before they become listed. DoD is cooperating with many public and private partners to identify and protect key habitats and species (e.g., long-leaf pine, shortgrass prairie, Sonoran Desert; Rusty Blackbird, Cerulean Warbler, Northern Bobwhite, Florida Scrub-Jay) in the most cost-efficient ways possible. These efforts, plus regional partnerships (e.g., Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability), help DoD to maintain maximum flexibility to use its lands for mission testing and training while also ensuring the long-term health of its natural resources. DoD will continue to explore innovative tools and technologies (radar, acoustic monitoring, geolocators, etc.) to monitor birds in inaccessible or dangerous habitats and better understand migratory connectivity to nonbreeding habitats outside the United States.

(Left) In California, Vandenberg Air Force Base maintains large, unbroken tracts of riparian habitat vital to many species of conservation concern, such as Nuttall’s Woodpecker and Willow Flycatcher.

Conservation in Action

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Recovery

Prior to European settlement, more than 3 million Red-cockaded Woodpeckers nested in 90 million acres of southern longleaf pine savannas. Timber harvesting, settlement and urbanization, and fire suppression reduced longleaf ecosystems to less than 2 million acres. By 1973, the woodpecker population dropped to below 10,000.

DoD-managed lands support more than a quarter of the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker population in southern pine forests and have been critical for the recovery of this species. Implementation of prescribed fires, planting of seedlings, and provision of artificial nest cavities are helping recover fire-dependent longleaf ecosystems and woodpecker populations.

Army bases and Eglin Air Force Base (Florida) contributed most of the population increases in the 1990s. Fort Bragg (North Carolina) was the first public land unit to reach the population recovery goal of 350 nesting clusters, a 50% increase to its 1973 population. The North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership and the Private Lands Initiative are models of public-private collaboration that have benefited Fort Bragg and this endangered species.



RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER BY GREG LAVATY