

# The Conservation and Management of Migratory and Resident Birds and their Habitats on Department of Defense Lands<sup>1</sup>

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Managing over 25 million acres of land on hundreds of installations, the United States Department of Defense (DoD) plays a key role in Partners in Flight (PIF). Department of Defense lands represent a critical network of habitats for neotropical migratory birds, offering these birds migratory stopover areas for resting and feeding, and suitable sites for nesting and rearing their young.

While DoD is a large federal landholder, we are not recognized as a land management agency. Unlike most of the agencies represented here whose primary mission is to accomplish basic conserve natural resources management, our mission is inherently destructive. The use of air-to-ground ordnance, tracked vehicles, ship-to-shore ordnance, underwater testing and amphibious assault maneuvers tend to take a toll on the environment. No one would argue that we must provide these training opportunities for our nation's armed forces. I think we would all agree that we want those who go in harm's way to have every advantage, and that requires realistic training. At the same time, though, the general public, government regulators, and many non-governmental organizations expect us to accomplish this mission with as little impact to the environment as possible.

Conservation and military readiness are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, we must identify define, understand, and manage the relationship between the two. To do this we must have up-to-date information on the natural resources under our control. Fortunately, the DoD has a small, dedicated, well-leveraged group of natural resources managers to help us acquire and use the data necessary to blend these two seemingly opposed issues. It is these professionals who acquire and manage the information needed to develop each installation's Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP). A network of DoD PIF representatives ensure the habitat needs of birds are adequately incorporated in these plans.

There are a whole host of public laws and regulations to which we are bound. However, the Sikes Act, which can be thought of as our Organic Act, requires the Secretary of Defense to carry out a program to provide for the conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources on military installations. The Sikes Act was originally established in the 1940s to authorize a hunting program on Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. Since that time it has been amended many times, and is now the basic statutory requirement for DoD to manage natural resources.

While the act Sikes Act has long promoted the development of natural resources management plans and the cultivation of a working relationship with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and State Fish and Game Departments, the Sikes Act Improvement Amendments of 1997 now make the development of an INRMP mandatory and the relationship with the USFWS and states more formal.

As of 17 November 2001, we (DoD) completed our first wave of "required" INRMPs. We are also now required to regularly report to Congress on the status of these plans and their updates. Each INRMP will must be updated on a 5-year cycle.

The Sikes Act states that, "Consistent with the use of military installations to ensure the preparedness of the armed forces, the secretaries of the military departments shall provide for:

1. The conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources on military installations;
2. The sustainable multipurpose use of the resources, which shall include hunting, fishing, trapping, and non-consumptive uses; and
3. Subject to safety requirements and military security, public access to military installations to facilitate the use."

In addition, the Sikes Act addresses specific components of the INRMP to be included: "Consistent with the use of military installations to ensure the preparedness of the armed forces, each INRMP shall, to the extent appropriate and applicable, provide for:

<sup>1</sup>A version of this paper was presented at the **Third International Partners in Flight Conference, March 20-24, 2002, Asilomar Conference Grounds, California.**

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1. Fish and wildlife management, land management, forest management, and fish- and wildlife-oriented recreation;
2. Fish and wildlife habitat enhancement or modifications;
3. Wetland protection, enhancement, and restoration, where necessary for support of fish, wildlife, or plants;
4. Integration of, and consistency among, the various activities conducted under the plan;
5. Establishment of specific natural resource management goals and objectives and time frames for proposed action;
6. Sustainable use by the public of natural resources to the extent that the use is not inconsistent with the needs of fish and wildlife resources;
7. Public access to the military installation that is necessary or appropriate, subject to requirements necessary to ensure safety and military security;
8. Enforcement of applicable natural resource laws (including regulations);
9. No net loss in the capability of military installation lands to support the military mission of the installation; and
10. Such other activities as the secretary of the military department determines appropriate.”

Of course, one of the most critical elements of the INRMP is the conservation of birds and their habitats. In an effort to provide our installation natural resources managers the information and direction they need to support PIF, we developed and implemented a specific DoD PIF Strategic Plan in 1994. This Plan detailed our goals and objectives and established a network of biologists and land managers to implement measures to conserve birds and their habitats. This Plan has served us well over the last several years.

As we move into another era of bird conservation, we will be guided by the newly revised published 2002 DoD PIF Strategic Plan (DoD PIF 2002), which has been endorsed by the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Environment), John Paul Woodley, Jr. Written primarily by our DoD PIF Program Manager with input from the all DoD PIF representatives, this revised Plan reflects the growth of the DoD PIF initiative over the last 10 years, and will help us to better address the conservation of all birds. The best way to do this is to ensure that every installation natural resources manager is aware and on board with the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan, and that these goals and objectives are reflected in their installa-

tion INRMPs. Like the original, this revised Plan will be promulgated through the chain of command to each of the services and from there, to the installation level, where the INRMPs are developed and implemented.

We have gone to great lengths to ensure that local and relevant bird conservation information is made available to our installation natural resources managers for their use in the development and implementation of their INRMPs. In addition to participation at our annual DoD conservation meeting, where we promote the PIF initiative, we have developed a DoD PIF website (<http://www.dodpif.org>). One part of the website links the installation natural resources manager with the Partners in Flight bird conservation strategy – the “Flight Plan”, as well as the specific bird conservation plan for the physiographic area or state where the installation is located. We also provide a link to the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory for the species priority list for the subject installation. Our objective here was to provide our natural resources managers with the relevant data they need to properly address bird conservation in their INRMPs.

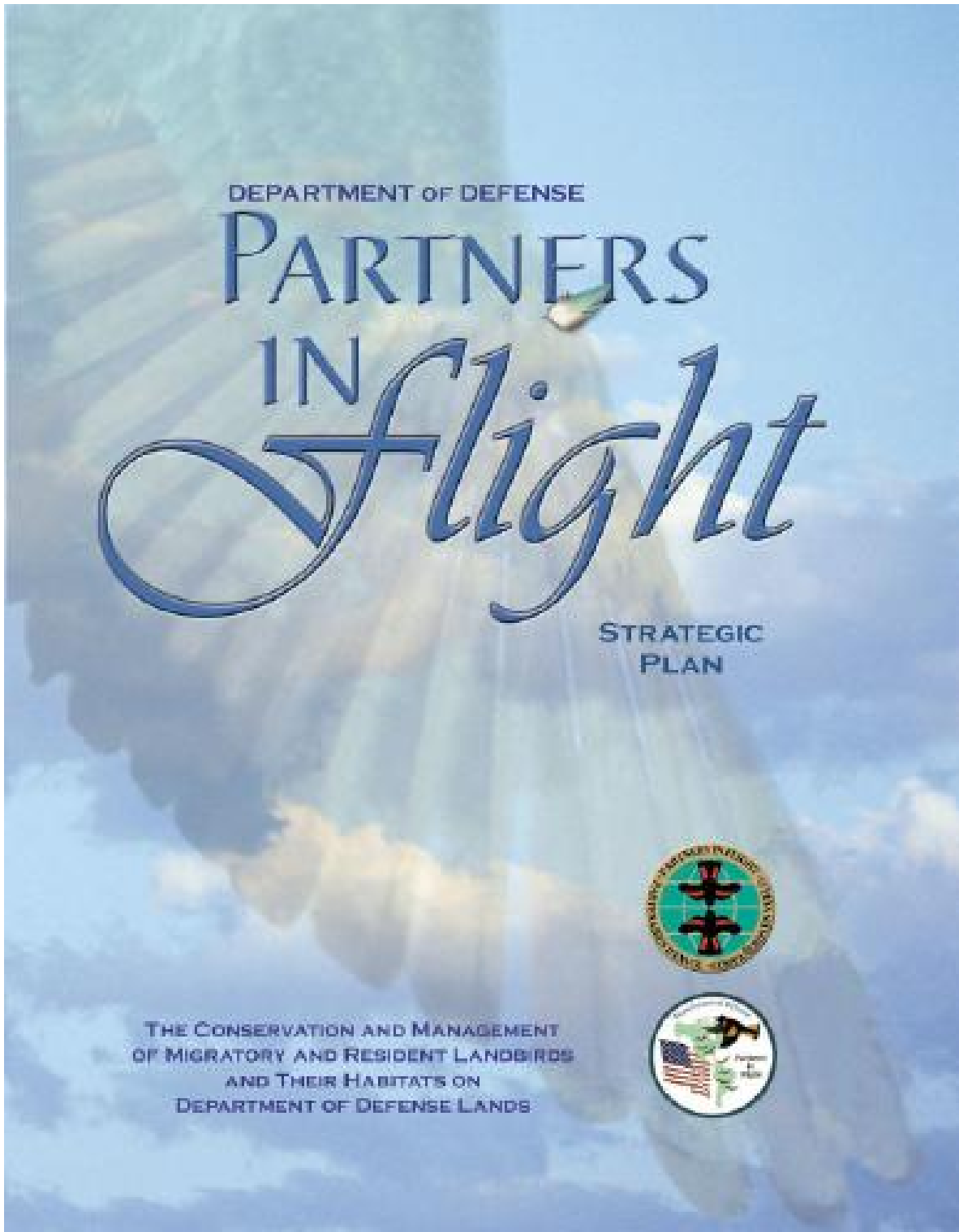
We have accomplished much over the last 10 years in support of bird conservation initiatives. One of our primary objectives will continue to be the cultivation of a better working relationship with conservation agencies and organizations through the efforts of our DoD PIF Program Manager to ensure that we are on the right course. One of the best things we have done, though, is to find and hire Chris Eberly as the DoD PIF Program Manager. Chris has done much to cultivate a working relationship with many of you in this audience to help ensure that we maintain the right course. Chris, together with Rich Fischer, will give a follow up to this presentation later this morning with some detailed examples of just how we integrate bird conservation objectives into our natural resources programs. Wherever possible, we will strive to implement cooperative projects and programs on DoD lands to benefit the health and well being of birds and their habitats.

## Acknowledgments

I thank A. Dalsimer, DoD Legacy Program and C. Eberly, DoD PIF for helpful comments on this manuscript.

## Literature Cited

- Department of Defense Partners in Flight (DoD PIF). 2002. **Department of Defense Partners in Flight Strategic Plan: The conservation and management of migratory and resident birds and their habitats on Department of Defense lands.** The Plains, VA: Department of Defense Partners in Flight.



**Figure 1**— The Department of Defense recently unveiled its new Partners in Flight Strategic Plan, which provides the framework for incorporating bird conservation efforts into installation Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans. Over \$15 million has been invested in hundreds of bird conservation projects over the last ten years.



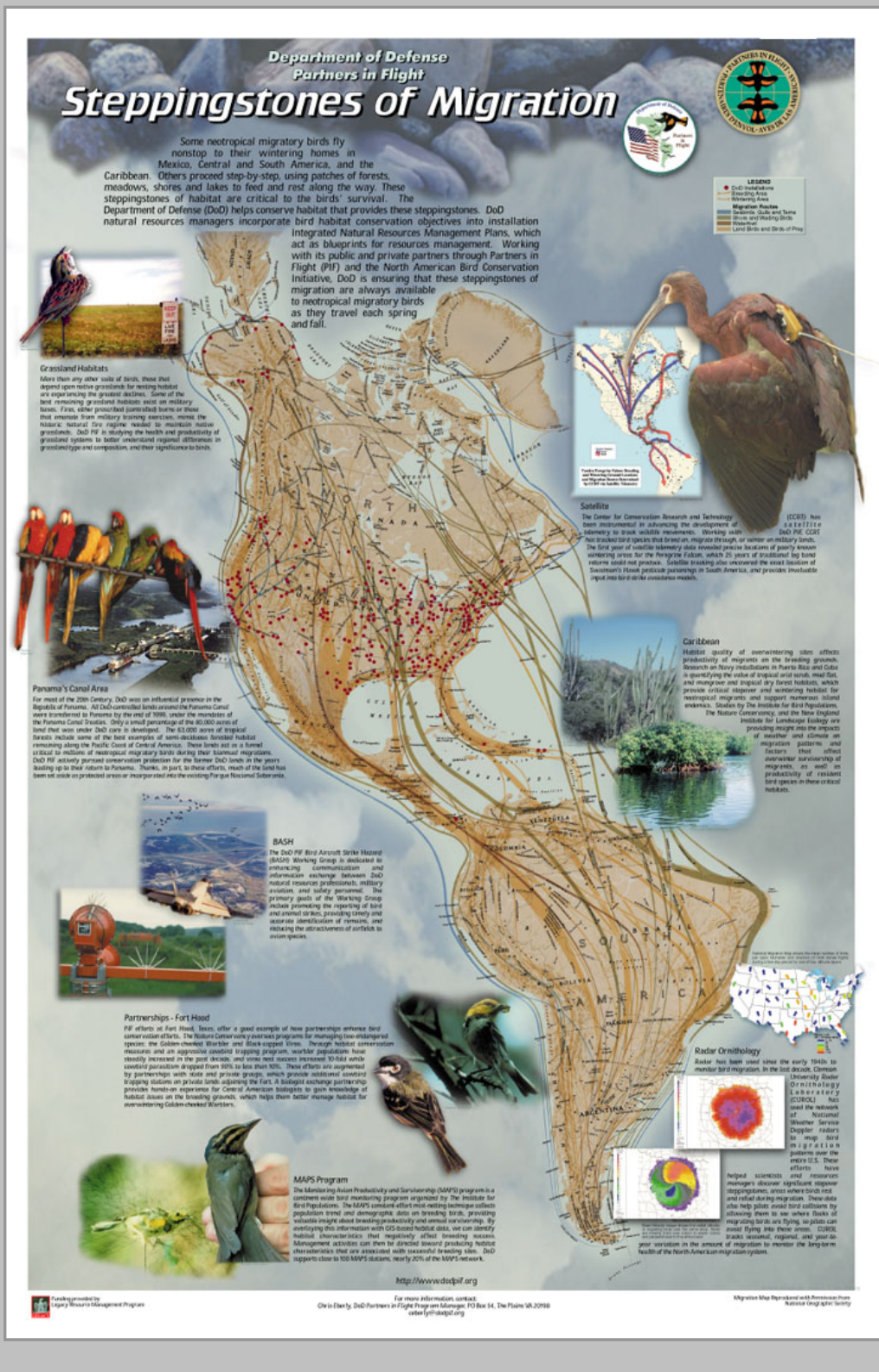


Figure 2— Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans have been prepared and implemented for over 380 Department of Defense installations covering millions of acres throughout the country. These DoD landholdings provide critical stopover sites for numerous migratory birds.