

Appendix C - Bird Conservation Area Management Guidance Summary

**New York State
Bird Conservation Area Program
Management Guidance Summary**

Site Name: Green Lakes BCA

State Ownership and Managing Agency: Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation

Location: Onondaga County, Town of Manlius

Size of Area: ~ 1,002 acres

DEC Region: 7

OPRHP Region: Central

General Site Information: The Green Lakes BCA is located within Green Lakes State Park. The park is located ~5 miles east of the city of Syracuse and is bordered on the north by portions of the Old Erie Canal State Historic Park. One 18-hole golf course is available for public use in the southeastern portion of the park. Overnight accommodations are available in cabins or campgrounds. The park offers numerous other recreational activities, including biking, hiking, swimming and cross-country skiing.

Vision Statement: The BCA will be managed for the conservation of mature forest and grassland bird species. Green Lakes BCA will serve as a flagship site for the conservation of grassland birds within the New York State Park system. Recreational/interpretive opportunities and access will continue in a manner consistent with conservation of the diverse assemblage of bird species using the area for breeding or during migration.

Key BCA Criteria: Migratory concentration site; diverse species concentration site (ECL §11-2001, 3. e. and f.). The BCA is unique in that it contains significant tracts of both mature forest and grassland habitat, providing habitat for an unusually diverse suite of bird species. The grasslands within BCA represent the largest concentration of grassland habitat in the New York State Park system. Grassland-breeding species include Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Mature forest birds include Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Eastern Wood-Pewee, and American Redstart.

Critical Habitat Types: Green Lakes BCA contains numerous habitats of statewide significance. In the western portion of the park is an extensive complex of grasslands and old fields. Grassland habitat, and the birds that depend on that habitat, have been declining throughout the northeastern U.S. The grasslands within the Green Lakes BCA provide habitat for a number of regionally declining birds, including Grasshopper Sparrow (special concern) and Northern Harrier (threatened). In addition, the BCA contains a relatively large tract of interior forest, including old-growth forest, which provides important breeding habitat for mature forest birds, such as Ovenbird and Wood Thrush. Finally, the meromictic lakes, from which the BCA takes its name, provide stopover and foraging sites for many birds dependent upon open water, including Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Wood Duck.

Operation and Management Considerations:

- *Identify habitat management activities needed to maintain site as a BCA.*

The fields within the western portion of the park are currently undergoing succession, with shrubs and trees gradually becoming established within these fields. The majority of these woody plants are non-native invasive species. Continued establishment of woody plants will eliminate habitat for grassland-dependent bird species, many of which are state-listed. Efforts should be made to remove woody vegetation from critical fields, and to maintain these fields as grassland bird habitat through regular mowing (every two to three years). In addition, many of the existing fields are fragmented by hedgerows, which limit the effective size of grasslands and provide travel corridors for nest predators such as raccoons. OPRHP should consider selective removal of hedgerows to increase connectivity of grasslands while protecting viewshed and patron experiences..

Invasive species, such as Pale Swallow-wort, have successfully established themselves within the BCA. These non-native species have the potential to significantly transform the current habitat within the BCA, and reduce habitat quality for a wide range of birds (DiTommaso et al. 2004, Ortega et al. 2006). Management should focus on efforts to inhibit the establishment and spread of invasive vegetation, and encourage growth of native species in the BCA.

The deer population within the BCA is currently impacting the survival and regeneration of native vegetation, particularly within forested habitats. Habitat quality has already been reduced for bird species dependent on understory vegetation. Furthermore, the large deer population, by preferentially browsing on native species, can aid the spread of invasive species (Côté et al. 2004). Park staff should investigate appropriate measures to reduce the impacts of the deer population on vegetation throughout the BCA.

- *Identify seasonal sensitivities; adjust routine operations, accordingly.*

Grassland management of fields in the western portion of the BCA as outlined in the Grassland Management Plan for Green Lake State Park (OPRHP 2010), includes regular field mowing. Once grassland restoration activities have been completed, mowing activities should be timed to minimize disturbance to nesting birds, preferably after August 15. Regular mowing of trails should continue as normal.

- *Identify state activities or operations that may pose a threat to the critical habitat types identified above; recommend alternatives to existing and future operations, which may pose threats to those habitats.*

There are currently no OPRHP activities that pose a threat to critical habitat types.

- *Identify any existing or potential use impacts; recommend new management strategies to address those impacts.*

Current levels of use by park visitors are consistent with the conservation of birds and their habitats at the BCA. Should future recreational development occur within the western grasslands, trails or other developments should be located to the periphery of large fields, to the extent possible.

- *Assess current access; recommend enhanced access, if feasible.*

Current access is adequate. Park grounds are open year-round. Trails are available for hiking, biking and skiing.

Education, Outreach, and Research Considerations:

- *Determine education and outreach needs; recommend strategies and materials.*

Any habitat management activities, particularly mowing within grassland habitats, are likely to bring public scrutiny. Outreach efforts should attempt to inform the public, prior to the initiation of habitat management, about the importance of grasslands and the potential benefits to rare bird species. Outreach efforts should continue during any habitat management activities to reinforce this message. Consideration could be given to installing permanent informative materials focused on the need for regular management of grassland habitats.

A BCA kiosk will be designed and installed in an appropriate location within the park.

Develop/enhance partnerships with environmental organizations and bird conservation groups such as Onondaga Audubon Society as well as adjacent landowners with similar open habitats to enhance the effectiveness of grassland management (e.g. Sister of St. Francis at Alverna Heights).

- *Identify research needs; prioritize and recommend specific projects or studies.*

Initial surveys conducted in 2009 have documented the baseline conditions for grassland bird populations. Surveys should continue, annually if possible, to determine the extent of grassland bird use of the BCA and monitor the success of grassland restoration efforts.

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