Mission-Sensitive Species

Those with highest potential to impact DoD missions if federally listed under ESA

—Department of Defense Partners in Flight Mission-Sensitive Species Working Group

Department of Defense
Partners in Flight

Our Mission

Providing expertise on the management and conservation of birds and their habitats to sustain and enhance the military mission

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Background and Problem

Department of Defense (DoD) Partners in Flight (PIF) has identified, through a detailed technical analysis, 15 avian species occurring on DoD lands that may be at-risk of becoming listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) (Table 1). DoD PIF designated these as "Mission-sensitive Species" (MSS) due to their high potential to impact the military mission should ESA listing be warranted. The purpose of the MSS list is to help DoD Natural Resources Managers prioritize monitoring and management efforts of those species and their habitats to help reverse trends and/or prepare installations for potential listings. The DoD PIF MSS list provides recommendations based on best available science, and is not intended to supersede Military Service-specific monitoring, management, or funding priorities.

Least Tern (Sternula Antillarum antillarum), a PIF Mission-sensitive Species on Patrick Air Force Base, Florida. Photo by G. Fleming.

In 2008, DoD PIF Representatives from all regions (Southeast, Northeast, Midwest, West, Alaska, and Hawaii), representing all Military Services, each were tasked with providing a top ten list of migratory birds with the highest potential to impact military missions within their region of responsibility if those birds were ESA-listed. The original MSS list promoted by DoD PIF in 2011 (excluding Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands) was a combined list from this input and included 67 species. That list was then vetted extensively with experts from American Bird Conservancy. Since then, several additional species have been considered as MSS based on input from installations with specific mission-impact concerns. In 2017, DoD PIF began re-evaluating species (excluding Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands Region), based in part on their declining status using a standardized assessment process based on numerical and regulatory factors or concerns. This exercise identified 15 of these species as MSS. Installation managers in Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands Region were queried for priority species separately, and those will be addressed in a separate effort.

Review Criteria

DoD PIF recently reviewed 93 migratory bird species for their potential to be categorized as MSS based on several migratory bird regional and national assessment databases, including:

- Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trends
- National PIF overall population trend (% population change over the last 30 years)
- National PIF landbird population estimates database
- National PIF Continental Combined Score
- Associated Tri-National Concern status (Critical Needs (CR) or Immediate Needs (IM)).

DoD PIF also considered whether a species was an ESA Candidate, currently undergoing a 12-month status review for ESA listing, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service (USFWS) Focal species, a USFWS Bird of Conservation Concern, and/or Army Species At-Risk. Members of the DoD PIF MSS Working Group ranked each of the 93 Species (1 = Highest Priority; 2 = Moderate Priority; 3 = Low Priority) based on available assessment criteria and potential for mission impacts. Prior to assigning MSS designation, the Working Group placed specific emphasis on the frequency of species occurrences on military installations to evaluate their potential for mission impacts if federally listed. To assist this effort, the Working Group reviewed available monitoring data and the vast majority of DoD Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans for occurrence information; and also used the expertise of DoD PIF Representatives and installation Natural Resources Professionals to evaluate potential impacts of any future listings of MSS.

Rusty Blackbird (Euphagus carolinus), a PIF Mission-sensitive Species on Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. Photo by E. Neipert.

In addition to the 15 MSS, DoD PIF also categorized 37 species as "Tier 2" species (Table 2). The majority of these species are experiencing long-term declines, and have some potential relevance to future mission impacts if federally listed, but are not considered highest priority based on DoD PIF's current review criteria. Proactive monitoring and management of Tier 2 species is encouraged when and where appropriate.

Reviewing and Updating the MSS List

DoD PIF encourages and accepts input from the Military Services, to include military natural resources managers, on additions and deletions to the MSS list based on best available scientific information. We will identify any emerging needs annually and complete a thorough review of both MSS and Tier 2 species every five years.

Table 1. DoD PIF Mission-Sensitive Species

Northern Bobwhite	Bendire's Thrasher
[1]Greater Sage-Grouse	Bachman's Sparrow
Greater Prairie-Chicken	[1]Henslow's Sparrow
Mountain Plover	Tricolored Blackbird
Least Tern (Atlantic Coast Pop)	[1]Rusty Blackbird
Burrowing Owl	[2]Golden-winged Warbler
Southeastern American Kestrel	Cerulean Warbler
Pinyon Jay	

[1]Army Species at Risk
[2]Undergoing 12-month status review to determine if listing is warranted - no ESA status

Table 2. DoD PIF Tier 2 Species

Scripps's Murrelet	Prothonotary Warbler
Ashy Storm-Petrel	Allen's Hummingbird
Long-billed Curlew	Canada Warbler
Snowy Plover (Gulf Coast)	Virginia's Warbler
King Rail	Loggerhead Shrike
Elegant Tern	Gilded Flicker
Eastern Whip-poor-will	Red-headed Woodpecker
Black-billed Cuckoo	Lewis's Woodpecker
Flammulated Owl	Wood Thrush
Swallow-tailed Kite	Gray Vireo
Le Conte's Thrasher	Chestnut-collared Longspur
Golden Eagle	Yellow-billed Magpie
Lesser Yellowlegs	Brown-capped Rosy-Finch
Grasshopper Sparrow	Prairie Warbler
Black-chinned Sparrow	Bell's Sparrow
Kentucky Warbler	Baird's Sparrow
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Lawrence's Goldfinch
Sprague's Pipit	

Tier 2 species are not listed as Army Species at Risk, undergoing 12-month status reviews, or proposed for ESA protection.