

# USACE Natural Resource Management

## Migratory Birds



### American Woodcock

### FAST FACTS

**REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS:** The American Woodcock is a popular game bird of eastern North America. Unfortunately, this species has experienced significant population declines since surveys first began in the 1960's. In fact, since the 1970's it is estimated that over 829,000 singing male woodcocks have been lost. (USFWS)

The species' decline is thought to be primarily a result of the loss and degradation of early successional forest habitat. Changes in land use and a shift in forest management has played a role in the loss of this habitat type. Despite the large population decline, this species is not federally listed. (USFWS)

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** In 1990 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service drafted the American Woodcock Management Plan. The goal of this strategic plan was to provide good habitat which would maintain and enhance woodcock populations by unifying and organizing cooperative efforts across various organizations. (USFWS) In 2008, a group of organizations came together to draft a new plan with similar intentions as USFWS's 1990 document. This new plan was the American Woodcock Conservation Plan.

Despite conservation efforts, USFWS's 2019 Singing-ground Survey data indicates that woodcock populations are still declining. From 2009-2019 the woodcock population trend has averaged -0.90% per year. (USFWS)

**HABITAT NEEDS:** The American Woodcock can be found in forest edges, forests, wet meadows, and old fields. (USFWS) Habitat varies seasonally as well as with time of day and activity. (Birds of the World, Cornell)

- Species displays a preference for young forest and abandoned farmland mixed with forest
- Old fields and forest openings are used as display areas for males
- Mixed woods with shrubs, especially alder less than 20 years old, provide moist ground for feeding. Overstory canopy cover of occupied habitat is typically 53-64% while shrub canopy cover is usually 75-87%.

**Size:** These plump shorebirds grow to be between 9 and 12 inches in length. (*All About Birds, Cornell*)

**Color:** This species has a leaf-brown mottling pattern in order to provide camouflage on the forest floor. The neck and back are light gray while the face is buffy with a blackish crown. (*All About Birds, Cornell*)

**Migration:** This species spends the spring and summer in the northern portions of its range and migrates South for the winter. (USFWS)

*Photo Credit: USFWS*

*Natural Resource Management (NRM)*

*This fact sheet has been prepared as an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This online publication is produced to provide its readers information about best management practices related to special status species. Editorial views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army. Mention of specific vendors does not constitute endorsement by the Department of the Army or any element thereof.*



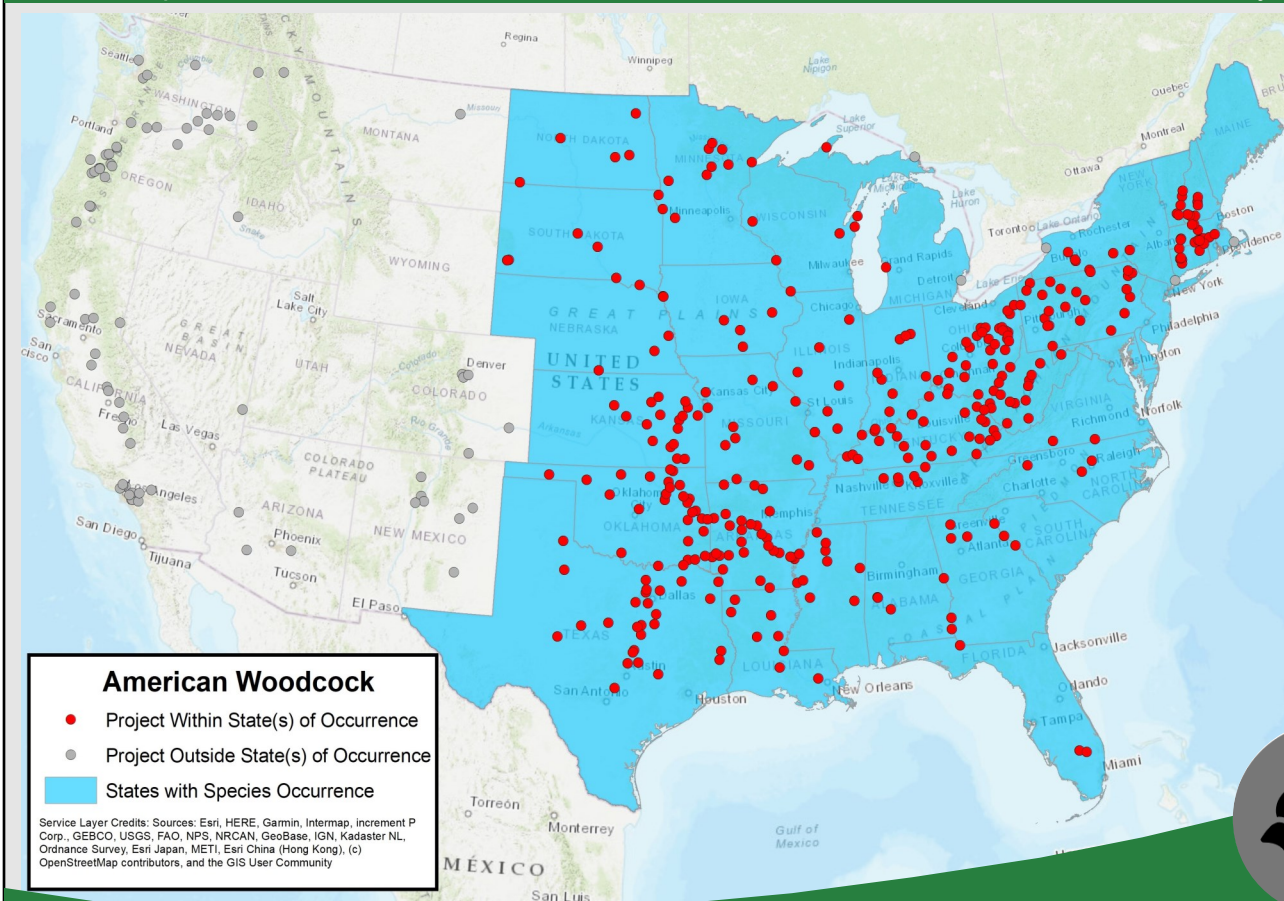
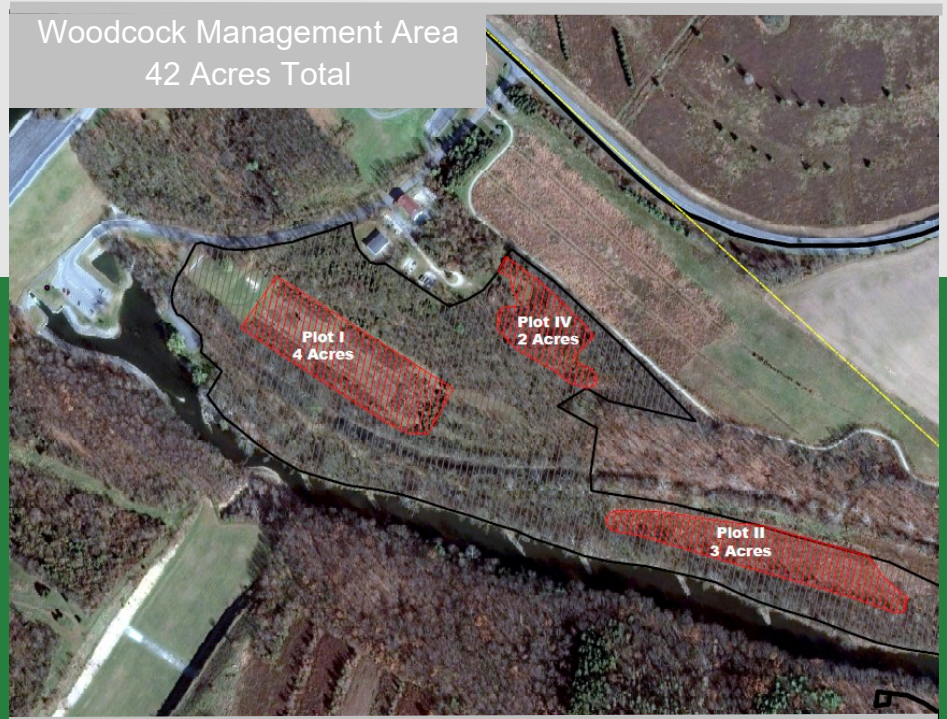
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## USACE ROLE:

Many USACE NRM projects fall within the range of this species; employing active habitat management strategies as suggested by numerous partner organizations can help slow the decline of area populations.

## WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:

Active and focused American Woodcock management began at Blue Marsh Lake, Philadelphia District, around 2002. At the time, a four acre plot, decommissioned from previous uses, was planted with aspen, speckled alder, and silky and gray dogwood. Seedlings were provided by the Pennsylvania Game Commission at no cost to the project. Plantings were conducted in phases to create varying levels of succession and continued at the rate of approximately 1,000 plantings per year for the next 10 years. Work was done by volunteers at the lake's Take Pride in Blue Marsh spring volunteer event. As desired habitat was achieved in the initial plot, efforts were expanded to a total of 42 acres for woodcock management. In 2020, a waterline completion project allowed partners to support creation of additional habitat via the mowing and spraying of a two acre plot. Approximately 750 native trees will be planted by partners, with USACE preparing the site and providing equipment as well as project oversight. Partners include the Ruffed Grouse Society, Berks Nature, Tulpehocken Creek Watershed Association, and Western Berks Watershed Authority.



Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ORISE Fellowship, Institute for Water Resources

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