

# USACE Natural Resource Management

## Migratory Birds



### Vesper Sparrow

### FAST FACTS

**REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS:** Despite a large range and population size in parts of North America, there has been a major regional decline of the Vesper Sparrow in the eastern United States.

NatureServe notes the status of the species in Kentucky, Tennessee, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut as critically imperiled while it has been possibly extirpated from Rhode Island.

The species is state listed as Threatened in Massachusetts where it was once considered a common summer resident. In Connecticut and New Jersey, the species is state listed as Endangered where they were also historically abundant nesters.

The regional decline in the northeastern population is attributed to reforestation, urbanization of grasslands, and changing agricultural practices such as removal of hedgerows and more frequent mowing and haying. As ground nesters, predation by small mammal species such as skunks, raccoons, and cats are also noted for aiding in population decline.

#### MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:

Suggested restoration guidelines are to plant native warm-season grasses in old fields and to provide undisturbed sparse vegetation and song perches along borders of crops.

**HABITAT NEEDS:** The species is unique in that it requires patches of bare ground within its breeding territory, making severely disturbed habitats such as reclaimed mines, overgrazed pasture, and row crops potentially suitable. (NY Department of Environmental Conservation). Farmed areas that are adjacent to fallow fields or contain uncultivated strips along fence-rows are favored. Habitat preference includes shorter grassland areas, such as:

- native prairies,
- pastures,
- hayfields,
- semidesert forests.

**Size:** The Vesper Sparrow grows to a length of 5.5 inches. (USGS)

**Color:** The four subspecies of Vesper Sparrow cannot reliably be separated in the field. Differences between the subspecies are limited to slight differences in shading of the plumage and variation in morphological measurements. Generally the species are noted by their long, dark tail with white outer feathers and white eye ring.

**Migration:** The Vesper Sparrow migrates relatively early in spring and late in fall. Peak migration occurs in many areas during April and October.

*Photos: All About Birds (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and Audubon*

*Natural Resource Management (NRM)*

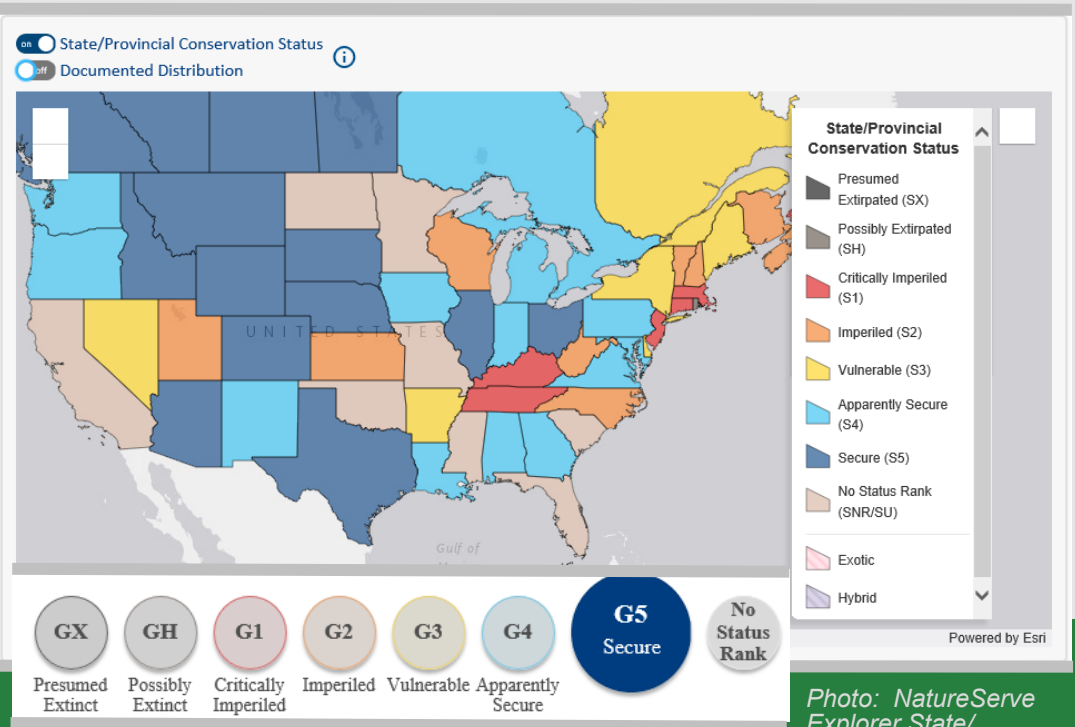
*This fact sheet has been prepared as an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This online publication is produced to provide its readers information about best management practices related to special status species. Editorial views and opinions expressed are not necessarily 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.*



**USACE ROLE:**

USACE operates a number of projects in states where the species has been listed as Critically Imperiled by Nature Serve including Kentucky, Tennessee, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

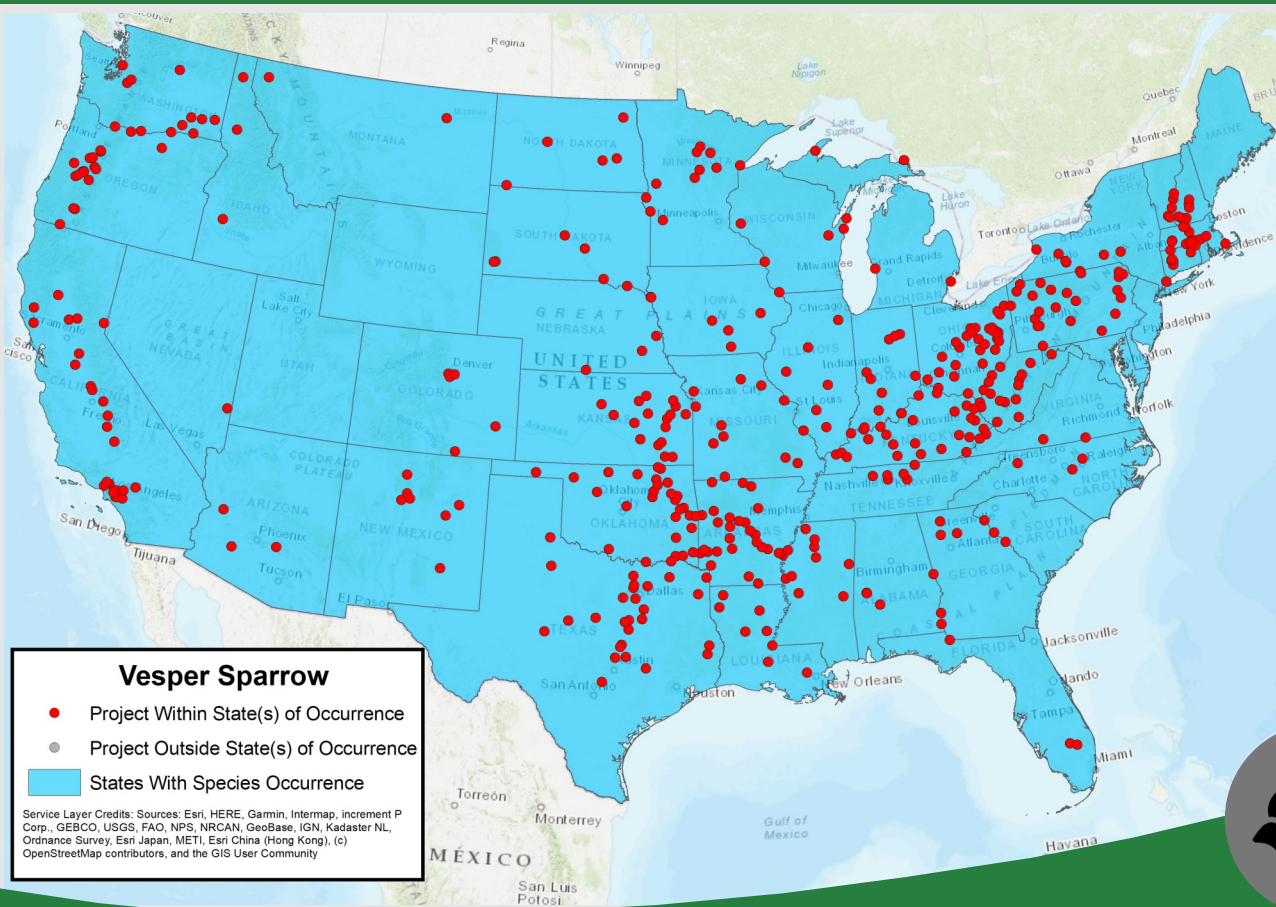
Additionally, USACE operates projects in states where the species is considered vulnerable including New York and Arkansas.



**WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:**

USACE projects such as the Cape Cod Canal, Hodges Village Dam, Littleville Lake, Knightville Dam, and Buffumville Lake in Massachusetts, manage public lands and waters that have the capability to support the species. These USACE projects have reported the potential for the species occurrence and as such, work diligently to analyze project plans to ensure that they will not have negative impacts on the Vesper Sparrow or its habitat.

*Photo: NatureServe Explorer State/Provincial Conservation Status for the Vesper Sparrow.*



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

**Migratory Birds**



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