

For the Birds, Part Two

Birds Link Western Land Trusts

How can local and regional land trusts scattered across 11 western states partner on conservation projects? The question arose during a 2010 Land Trust Alliance leadership training program. For Andrew Mackie of the Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas in Colorado and Marie McCarty of Kachemak Heritage Land Trust in Alaska, the answer was in the air. Migratory birds depend on habitat spanning states and even continents during their cycles of breeding, nesting, migration and overwintering. In the largely arid West, rivers and wetlands are particularly critical habitat.

Mackie, who has served as a wetland ecologist for the Audubon Society, sees opportunities for land trusts to partner with bird conservation organizations, volunteers and experts. “There are more plans for birds than any other organisms in the United States, but land trusts don’t always have the time and expertise to incorporate all of that research into their conservation planning and communications,” he says.

To increase connections between bird conservation entities and land trusts, Mackie and McCarty organized a post-Rally meeting in 2013 to launch “Wings Over Western Waters,” an initiative that brought 16 western land trusts together with representatives of the Pacific Coast and Intermountain West Joint Ventures, the Audubon Society, Partners in Flight, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and the Land Trust Alliance. The initiative’s goal is “to help land trusts with the science and planning needed to identify key species and habitats for protection, to form partnerships with bird conservation organizations, to contribute toward large-scale conservation initiatives and to bring in ‘big’ funding to help local land trusts complete projects,” says Mackie.

Since the meeting, informal partnerships have blossomed and a steering committee came together to plan next steps and reach out to more land trusts. Next on the horizon? “Wings is working with the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology on several possible projects to help land trusts in the West,” says Mackie. “Stay tuned.” •

Partnering to Aid Imperiled Warbler



KATHERINE NOBLETT

A golden-winged warbler

The golden-winged warbler has experienced one of the steepest declines of any North American songbird over the past 45 years. Once ranging across the northern Midwest, Great Lakes and Appalachian states, the bird

has lost much of its shrubland breeding habitat to development, agriculture and maturing forests. The dwindling numbers of golden-winged warblers that breed around the Great Lakes now represent 95% of the world population.

The Thousand Islands Land Trust and Indian River Lakes Conservancy are partnering with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon New York, New York’s Department of Environmental Conservation and Clarkson University to protect the imperiled warbler in one of its last strongholds. Their St. Lawrence Valley Partnership for Golden-winged Warblers is supported by a New York State Conservation Partnership Program Catalyst Grant, awarded in 2014 by the Land Trust Alliance through New York’s Environmental Protection Fund.

Partners will take a multipronged approach to enhancing and expanding the bird’s breeding habitat by providing training workshops to organizations and individual landowners and distributing information on best management practices.

Scientists will guide adaptive management of the warbler’s habitat on demonstration sites, says Thousand Islands Land Trust’s director of land conservation, Sarah Walsh. “We want to have these sites open to other land managers and the public to show they can do this, too. What we’re hoping to do is plant these seeds of small habitat restoration zones across the area.” •