



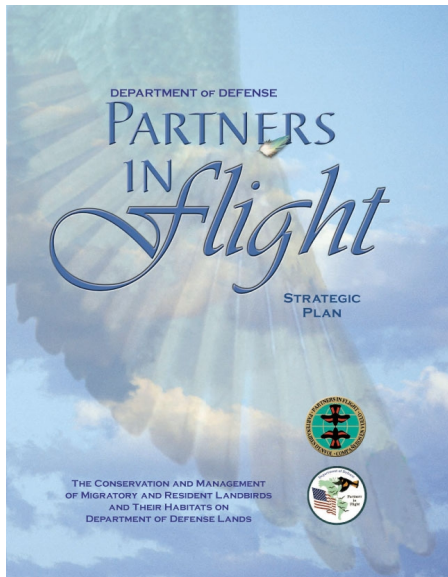
**Department of Defense
Partners in Flight**

Fact Sheet #1
December 2016

**Department of Defense
Partners in Flight Program**

Mission

To conserve migratory and resident birds and their habitats on Department of Defense lands.



Important Bird Areas

DoD lands benefit priority bird species

What is an Important Bird Area?

Some places are exceptionally important - even essential - for bird conservation. Directing protection and management efforts towards these sites is crucial if viable populations of many species are to persist in the long-term. Conservationists have long understood this fact, but only in recent years has a program emerged to identify and formally recognize these sites.

Important Bird Areas (IBA) are sites that are significant because they hold large concentrations or an exceptional diversity of birds, harbor rare or endangered species, or contain unique or threatened habitat. The IBA program is founded on the premise that identifying and conserving key habitat areas for bird populations is essential to bird conservation efforts. The program's goal is to identify and protect a network of sites around the world to help maintain naturally occurring bird populations. Specifically, IBA recognition means that a site provides essential habitat to breeding or non-breeding birds. While IBA sites vary in size, most are discrete and distinguishable from surrounding areas in character, habitat, or ornithological importance. It is important to note that there are *no* legal or management requirements imposed on sites identified as Important Bird Areas.

History of the IBA Program in the US

From its start in Europe in the 1980s by BirdLife International, the IBA concept has led to the recognition of more than 7,000 sites worldwide. The IBA Program was launched in the U.S. in 1995 by BirdLife partner designate American Bird Conservancy (ABC), which has identified and documented those sites of significance on a global level throughout all 50 states. The National Audubon Society (Audubon) initiated a state-based IBA program that

same year in partnership with ABC, and has been building programs state by state. As of 2004, Audubon was operating IBA programs in 46 states. Today, ABC continues its IBA program for sites of global significance, but Audubon is now the BirdLife partner designate in the U.S., and is expanding its IBA program to include sites of global and continental significance.



Fort Riley's (KS) 50,000 acres of native tallgrass prairie is the largest remaining contiguous habitat of this type in North America. Photo: Chris Eberly

Criteria

Generally, for a site to qualify as a global or continental IBA, it must, during at least some part of the year, contain habitat that supports: (1) significant numbers of a species of global conservation concern, such as Piping Plover, Kirtland's Warbler or Red-cockaded Woodpecker; (2) a species with a restricted range, such as Yellow-billed Magpie, Tricolored Blackbird or Brown-capped Rosy-Finch; (3) a species that is vulnerable because its populations are concentrated in one general habitat type or biome, such as Pinyon Jay, Brewer's Sparrow, or Oak Titmouse; or (4) a significantly large concentration of breeding, migrating or wintering birds, including waterfowl, seabirds, wading birds, raptors or landbirds. Continental and state level criteria scale down from the global criteria.

Military Lands as IBAs

Some Department of Defense (DoD) lands, including military installations and Army Corps of Engineers projects, have been identified as IBAs. In general, an IBA should exist as an actual or potential protected area, or should have the potential to be managed in some way for birds and general nature conservation. Military installations, through their Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans (INRMP) and Sikes Act compliance, manage their lands in ways that benefit native bird populations. Many Corps project sites also implement comprehensive management plans that enhance bird habitat. While IBAs have no minimum or maximum size, they should be large enough to supply all or most of the requirements of the bird(s) during the season for which they are important. DoD lands identified as IBAs also satisfy this need. To that end, the DoD PIF program endorses IBAs on military and Corps of Engineers lands, where appropriate.

Why are IBAs on DoD Lands Good?

Ultimately, by identifying high quality habitats and recognizing them as being important for birds, the IBA Program seeks to mobilize the resources needed to protect these areas by raising public awareness of their significance. With over 71 million Americans who watch and/or feed birds, the public is a powerful constituency for bird conservation. An important distinction should also be made that an IBA is not necessarily an important *birding* area. An IBA exists for birds, not for bird watchers. IBAs can include Watchable Wildlife opportunities, but only if such



Henslow's Sparrow, a Watch List species, thrives on U.S. military installations.
Photo: Teresa Vanosdol

opportunities do not compromise the military mission or continued conservation actions. On military lands, IBAs can be an effective tool to engage adjoining landowners in landscape level conservation planning. Sometimes, it is the training mission itself that creates and sustains quality habitat. IBA recognition is thus an important tool to educate the public that while DoD lands are managed to support the military's training mission, they also provide significant habitat for the conservation of natural resources, including birds. When a conservation plan is desired for a network of IBAs, INRMPs and Corps comprehensive management plans already provide the necessary information; no additional management planning is required.



Vandenberg Air Force Base provides undisturbed beaches for nesting, wintering, and migrating shorebirds and waterbirds.
Photo: Chris Eberly

Nomination Process

Any military installation or Army Corps of Engineers project is eligible to be nominated as an IBA if it potentially meets IBA criteria. Once a site is nominated, the appropriate organization reviews the nomination. If it meets the criteria, the site is identified as an IBA. Once a site has been identified, official recognition as an IBA via a ceremony or other public outreach method may take place at the discretion of the installation. A Memorandum of Understanding with American Bird Conservancy and National Audubon Society outlines the expected procedures to be followed for the IBA process on DoD lands. DoD sites recognized as IBAs may receive a certificate and sign.



Western Snowy Plovers breed and winter on military lands in coastal California.
US Navy Photo by Tim Burr

Conclusion

Identification of DoD lands as Important Bird Areas is recognition from an outside organization (American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon Society, or both) of the excellent stewardship that benefits resident and migratory birds and their habitats. Identification and/or recognition as an IBA entails *no* legal or management requirements. In addition, public access is not linked in any way to IBA status. Public bird watching opportunities exist independently; some IBAs will not be open for public access, and many sites with public birding will not qualify as IBAs. Regardless of public access, IBA status is public recognition of which to be proud.



For more information:

Richard A. Fischer, Ph.D.
DoD Partners in Flight National Coordinator
Richard.A.Fischer@usace.army.mil