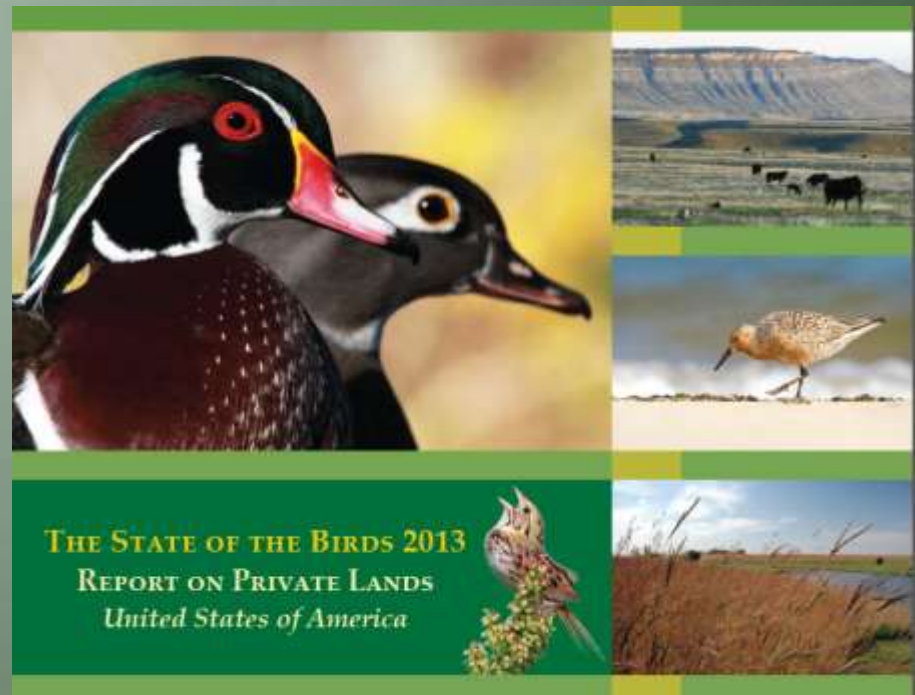


# 2013 U.S. State of the Birds Report on Private Lands

A product of the North American  
Bird Conservation Initiative  
State of the Birds sub-committee



... and many partners!



IMBD Theme 2015: *Restore Habitat, Restore Birds*

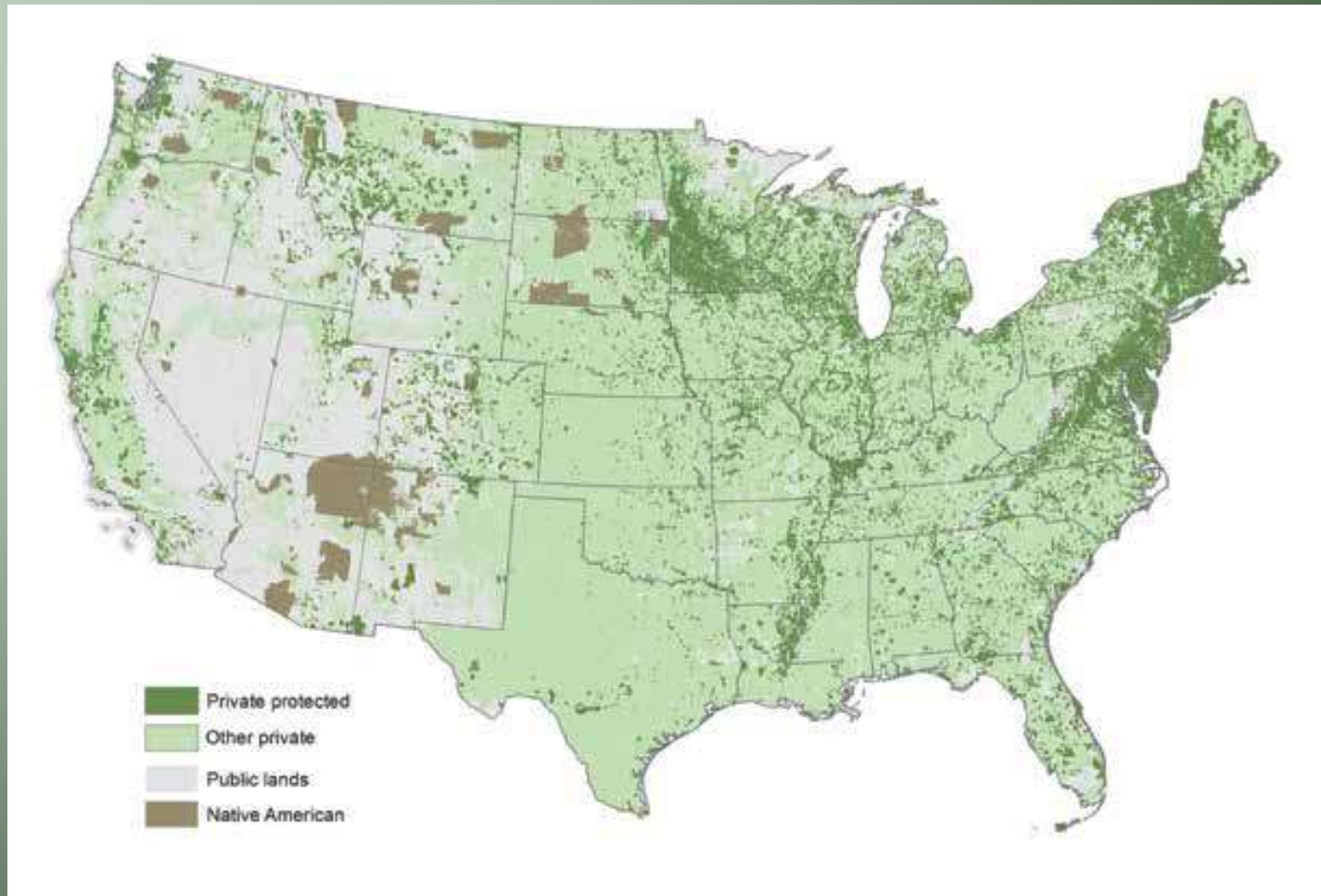
# The State of the Birds on Private Lands – 2013



“When land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land; when both end up better by reason of their partnership, we have conservation.”

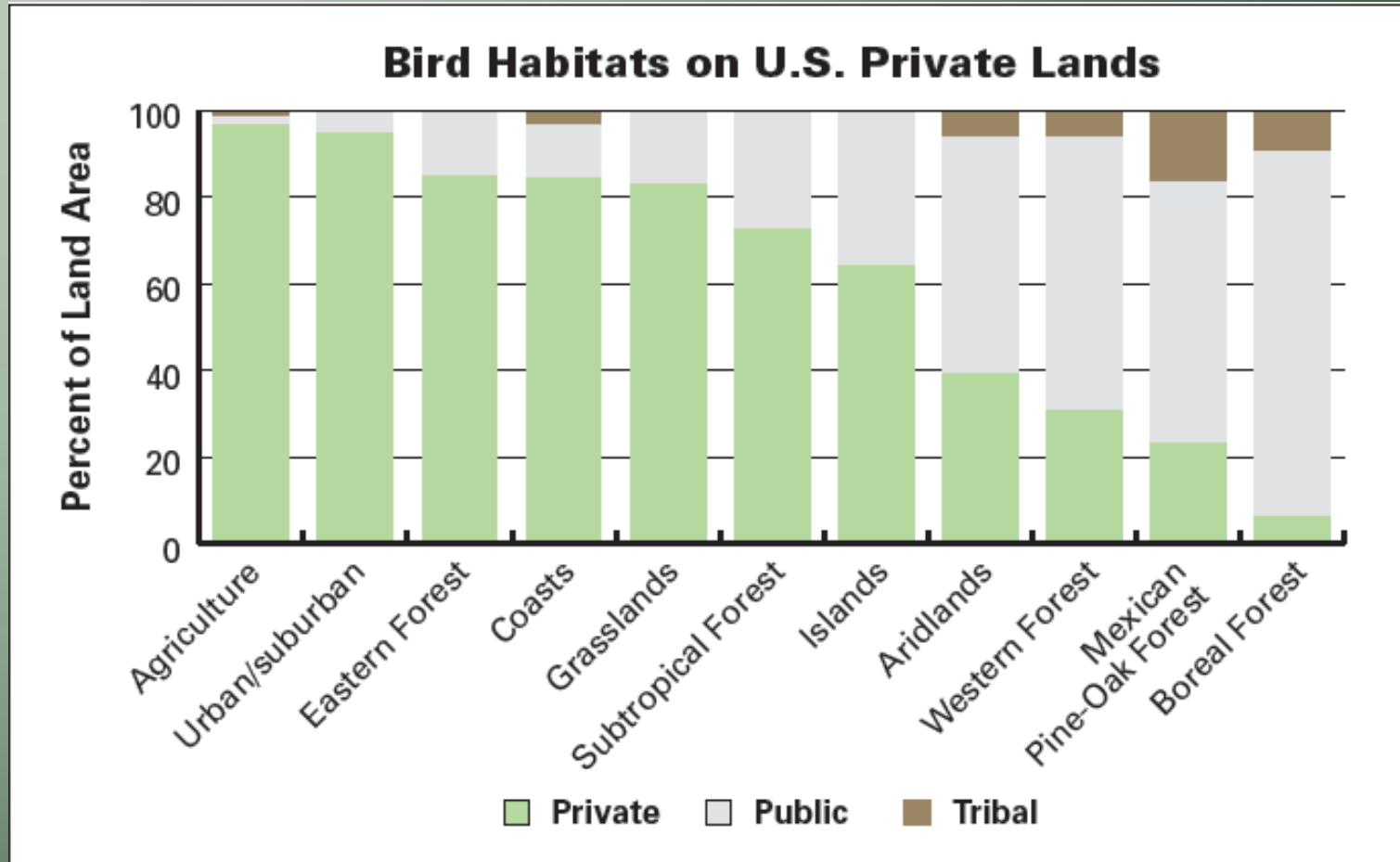
—*Aldo Leopold, The Farmer as a Conservationist*

# Distribution of Private Lands



Roughly 60% of the land area in the United States (1.4 billion acres) is privately owned...

# Bird Habitats on Private Lands



\* Wetlands not shown due to insufficient data. (~75%)

# Private Lands Habitat Chapters

## WETLANDS

### At a Glance

- Three-quarters of remaining wetlands are on private lands, making them vital to wetland bird conservation.
- More than half of the U.S. historic wetland habitat base of 220 million acres has been lost.



WOOD DUCK PHOTO BY DICKIE CHAMBERS

- The Wetlands Reserve Program has restored 2.6 million acres of private wetlands habitat.
- Wetlands sustain waterfowl populations and therefore duck hunting, which contributes more than \$2.3 billion in total economic output.
- Landowners and their communities see several benefits from wetlands conservation, such as flood mitigation and improved water quality.

### Wetland Birds on Private

Private lands are essential to wetland conservation, as three-quarters of the U.S. wetlands occur on private lands. By their abundance and diversity, and by their seasonal availability, private lands are effective in our nation's wetlands. Most of our breeding and wintering ducks, Black Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, and Wood Ducks are on private lands. Egrets, grebes, and rails also breed in wetlands throughout the year. Their communities likewise provide flood mitigation, ground water replenishment, and wetland-based

### Conservation Success

Funding from Farm Bill Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and known as Federal Duck American Wetlands Conservation Act public-private partnership of acres on private lands. The Wetlands Reserve Program provides financial incentives to landowners to

Restoring  
has been

### Conservation Challenges

Wetland habitat is vital for breeding, migrating and wintering birds. More than half of our nation's historic wetland habitat base of 220 million acres has been lost, with losses exceeding 80% in some regions. Although substantial acres of wetlands have been restored and conserved through programs such as WRP, many of these gains have been offset recently. Wetland protections from the Clean Water Act have been reversed, increasing crop prices have spurred a new wave of draining and converting wetlands for agricultural production. Residential development and urban expansion are impacting wetlands as well. Due to these pressures on our nation's already greatly reduced supply of wetlands, a diverse mix of programs is needed to encourage and support private landowners who conserve wetlands.

In the Prairie Pothole Region of the northern Great Plains, nearly 90% of the land is in private ownership, and 40% to 90% of native wetlands have been drained, primarily for agricultural production. The key challenge here involves protecting small wetlands amid large expanses of grass to support the productivity of prairie-wetland breeding birds. Prairie Pothole wetlands provide breeding habitat for dozens of waterbird species, such as Black Terns. This region is known as the "Duck Factory," because the shallow-water basins provide protein-rich invertebrate food resources for nesting females and growing ducklings. The eastern Dakotas alone supported more than 10 million breeding dabbling ducks in recent years. Successful waterfowl breeding here is dependent on the private landowners who are stewards of so

much of this habitat. Farm Bill Conservation Reserve Program payments to farmers and landowners provide economic compensation for reserving lands from planting that are not typically the most productive for growing crops. CRP lands in the Prairie Pothole Region have produced a net increase of 2 million waterfowl per year, or a 30% increase in breeding production, over the past two decades. Because duck production in the Prairie

A Gulf Coast wetlands complex east of Corpus Christi, Texas—consisting of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding privately owned wetlands—provides winter habitat for the only remaining wild population of Whooping Cranes. In 2012, The Nature Conservancy, with additional funding from the Whooping Crane Conservation Association, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other private donors and foundations, purchased a conservation easement on more than 100 acres at the Falcon Point Ranch to protect this prime parcel of coastal real estate (and important crane wintering habitat) from development.

### Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) at 20 Years



### Wood Duck Distribution



This map shows more than 11,000 WRP projects on 2.6 million acres. These often closely match habitats used by important waterfowl species, such as Wood Ducks. (Shading indicates higher probability of occupancy. Occupancy estimates were based on bird observations from aerial and satellite data.) Wood Duck photo courtesy of Ducks Unlimited.



Pothole Region is critical to the sustainability of North American waterfowl populations, protecting breeding habitat helps sustain the sport of duck hunting, which contributes more than \$2.3 billion in total economic output and more than 27,000 jobs to the U.S. economy. "CRP is a strategy in many parts of the country for growing the economy for this reason: habitat is also tied to an expansion of outdoor recreation and it is an enormous opportunity for rural America," said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

Along the Gulf Coast, marshes from Mobile Bay, Alabama, to the Rio Grande in Texas are being lost. Historically, the amount of coastal marsh fluctuated due to elemental factors (such as amount of sediment deposited in deltas), but recently the trend has been completely downward, with net wetland loss in the region currently estimated at about 10,000 acres per year. Although there are many important publicly owned lands across this region, most land is privately owned. These coastal marsh wetlands constitute a continentally important habitat for migratory birds. Up to 13 million waterfowl winter here, including about 90% of the continental population of Mottled Ducks. Gulf Coast wetlands provide breeding, winter, and migration habitat to nearly every wading bird species, including Roseate Spoonbill and Wood Stork.



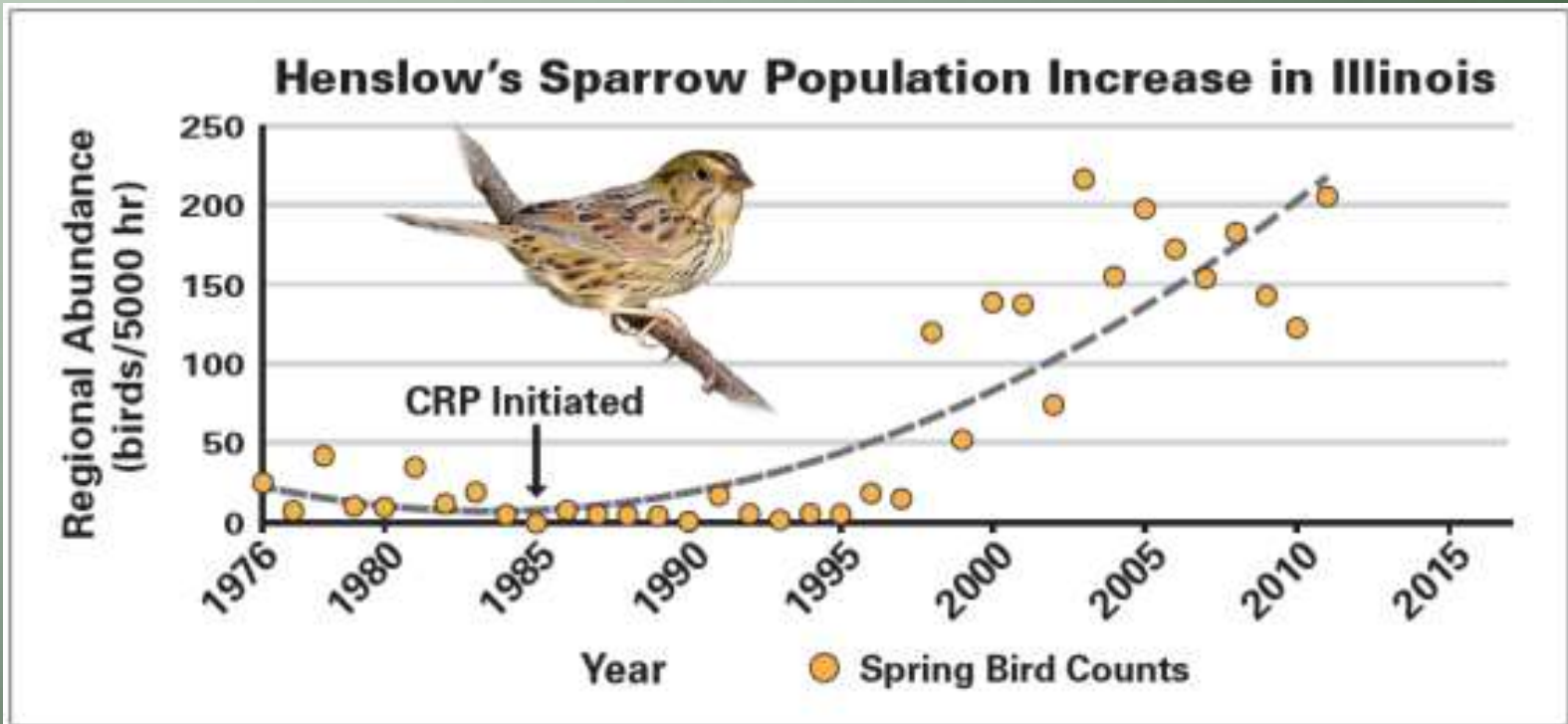
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT



# State of the Birds Key Messages

- More than 100 species of birds have 50% or more of their U.S. breeding distributions on private lands.
- Private protected lands have great conservation importance.
- **Wetlands:** Support more than 75% of the breeding and wintering distributions of waterfowl.
- **Grasslands:** 90% of 7 breeding obligate grassland bird species are on private lands.
- **Forests:** Over 300 forest-breeding bird species depend on working private timberlands.
- Conservation works!

# Farm Bill Programs Crucial for Grassland Birds



*In Illinois, regional spring counts of Henslow's Sparrows are now about 25 times greater than 30 years ago, prior to the Farm Bill's Conservation Reserve Program. Henslow's Sparrow by Chris Wood. Graphic courtesy of James Herkert.*

In the Dakotas and Montana, CRP lands have also yielded a net increase of 2 million waterfowl per year!



# State of the Birds Key Messages

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- **Forests:** Over 300 forest-breeding bird species depend on working private timberlands
- Conservation works!
- **Private lands conservation needs greater support for strong and cost-effective programs, policies, and partnerships.**



# Private lands conservation takes many forms....

- ▣ Incentives from government programs
- ▣ Technical assistance from university extension services
- ▣ Easements brokered by nonprofit groups



# Today's Agenda at a Glance

- ▣ Plenaries on:
  - Wetlands
  - Forests
  - Grasslands (2)
  - Urban/suburban
  
- ▣ Three concurrent sessions:
  - The birds
  - Our state perspective
  - Management options
  - Success stories from landowners like you

