

PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES FOR AMERICAN WOODCOCK MANAGEMENT IN MAINE

**Prepared by: Andrew Weik
May 10, 2002**

Problem 1: Habitat conditions along woodcock singing male survey routes may not be representative of habitat across the larger landscape in Maine and elsewhere, and so may not accurately index the breeding population.

Strategy 1.1: The department needs to support partners (USGS) in investigations regarding the ability of the singing male survey to accurately index woodcock populations.

Strategy 1.2: Based on results from Strategy 1 (above), the department and partners may need to adjust the allocation of survey routes.

Problem 2: Habitat deterioration on migration stop-over sites and on the wintering grounds may be more limiting to Maine's breeding woodcock population than conditions within Maine.

Strategy 2.1: The department needs to support and fully participate in coordinated efforts to promote the establishment and maintenance of early successional habitats for woodcock throughout the Eastern region.

Strategy 2.2: The department must secure adequate funding and/or redistribute existing personnel to support full participation in an Eastern region habitat conservation program.

Problem 3: Lack of personnel time and funding to implement population, habitat, and outreach goals and objectives.

Strategy 3.1: The department must secure adequate funding and/or redistribute existing personnel to support annual programmatic needs, including habitat management on public lands and an American Woodcock (early successional habitat) outreach program.

Strategy 3.2: The department needs to obtain additional sources of funds to address priority research needs as they arise.

Strategy 3.3: Support and work through federal aid programs (e.g., Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Forest Stewardship Program, Stewardship Incentives Program) to implement habitat objectives.

Problem 4: Forest practices on private land depend largely on market forces (forest products supply and demand, which may influence landowner objectives) and forestry regulations.

Strategy 4.1: The department needs to provide technical support and information regarding the effects of various forestry practices on woodcock habitat, and to assess potential effects of forestry regulations on wildlife.

Strategy 4.2: When the effects of a silvicultural practice on woodcock habitat are not known but are thought to be important, the department needs to conduct investigations to understand those effects.

Strategy 4.3: The department and partners need to work with industrial landowners to encourage forest management that will benefit woodcock and other early successional forest wildlife.

Strategy 4.4: The department needs to be involved in developing and reviewing criteria that are used in forest certification programs (e.g., programs of the Forest Stewardship Council, Sustainable Forestry Initiative), and ensure that habitat features that are important to American Woodcock are given full consideration in these certification programs.

Strategy 4.5: The department must secure adequate funding and/or redistribute existing personnel to provide support for this program.

Problem 5: Many small non-industrial forest land ownerships are unmanaged, or managed for mature or old growth forest; as a result of forest maturation, these stands are becoming poor habitat for woodcock and other wildlife that use early-successional habitats.

Strategy 5.1: In conjunction with partners, develop and implement a program to increase the awareness and understanding of American Woodcock and other wildlife that use early-successional habitats in Maine.

Strategy 5.2: Work with partners to develop new outreach materials and adapt existing educational materials and resources for use in Maine.

Strategy 5.3: Work with partners to improve wildlife extension capabilities within Maine.

Strategy 5.4: The department must secure adequate funding and/or redistribute existing personnel to provide support for this program.

Problem 6: Many publics perceive that forest harvesting, and clear cutting in particular, is “bad” for wildlife, and that managing for mature or old growth forest is “good” for wildlife; consequently, early successional habitats and the wildlife that depend on them are declining in the more densely populated areas of the State, and on many national forests and national parks.

Strategy 6.1: In conjunction with partners, develop and implement a program to increase awareness and understanding of early successional habitats and the wildlife that depend on them. The program should include development and dissemination of educational material via a variety of media, as well as habitat management demonstration areas near human population centers and in national, state, and local parks.

Strategy 6.2: The department and partners must secure adequate funding and/or redistribute existing personnel to provide support for this program.

Problem 7: Upland bird hunters have experienced conflicts with deer hunters during the early portion of the firearms deer season. The public working group indicated that satisfaction among bird hunters, particularly those who use dogs, would be increased if the overlap during October between the regular firearms deer season and the woodcock hunting season were eliminated by starting the deer season no earlier than November 1. Currently, the regular firearms deer season follows the previous legislated framework: the season runs for 4 full consecutive weeks, ending on the Saturday after Thanksgiving; a Saturday “residents-only” day of deer hunting precedes the Monday opener of the regular deer season. During most years this season structure causes the deer season to begin on the last Saturday in October, and may put up to 4 days of the firearms deer season in October. Decreasing the amount of overlap in October between firearms deer hunting and woodcock hunting seasons will reduce the likelihood of conflicts between deer hunters and bird hunters, particularly those who hunt over dogs. Setting the regular firearms deer season several days later than the current structure allows would result in seasons that, on average, more evenly bracket the peak of the breeding season (rut), and therefore would likely increase the deer encounter rate (and satisfaction) for deer hunters, as well as improve satisfaction among upland bird hunters.

Strategy 7.1: In 2001, the Legislature changed the deer season framework to allow for open seasons on deer during September 15-December 15, with the requirement “(I)n any year that the regular season extends beyond November 30th, the regular season must start no later than the 4th Monday preceding Thanksgiving.” This change in law gives the Commissioner the

ability to eliminate the October overlap between woodcock and firearms deer seasons by adjusting the regular firearms deer season dates to a beginning date of November 1 or later.

Problem 8: In 1997 hunter satisfaction declined when the USFWS shortened the woodcock season from 45 to 30 days, and changed the opening date from October 1 to October 6, in an effort to reduce the harvest of woodcock out of concern for the long term decline in the Eastern Region breeding population index (the Central Region currently has a 45 day season, 3 bird daily bag, and framework opening date of the Saturday nearest September 22; population trends over the last 10 years have been similar in both regions). Since then, research in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Pennsylvania has demonstrated no effect of hunting on survival of woodcock.

Strategy 8.1: Through the Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section, work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore the 1996 woodcock season framework of 45 hunting days, a 3 bird daily bag limit, and an October 1 season opening.

Problem 9: Currently, Maine hunters cannot participate fully in the woodcock season allowed by the federal framework because additional hunting days are not granted to compensate for Maine's Sunday hunting closure.

Strategy 9.1: Through the Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section, work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to allow compensatory days for Maine's Sunday hunting closure. Compensatory days are allowed for waterfowl hunting.