
Grasshopper Sparrow

Ammodramus savannarum

Aves — Passeriformes — Emberizidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide:	Secure (G5)
Statewide:	Imperiled breeding (S2B)
ESA:	No status
USFS:	Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM:	Watch list (Type 5)
IDFG:	Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Rangewide population declines.

TAXONOMY

Twelve subspecies are recognized altogether, 4 of which breed in North America; *A. s. perpallidus* is the subspecies that breeds in Idaho (Vickery 1996). Differentiation among subspecies is based primarily on plumage coloration and is weakly defined for several subspecies; further study is warranted in this field.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The grasshopper sparrow breeds locally from southern Maine, southeastern New Hampshire, western Vermont, southern Quebec and southeastern Ontario, upper peninsula of Michigan, central and western Minnesota, southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and southeast Alberta south to North and South Carolina, central Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, northern Louisiana, Texas, west to Oklahoma, eastern Colorado, eastern Wyoming, and all but westernmost Montana (Vickery 1996). Also breeds in southern British Columbia, eastern Washington, northeast Oregon, portions of southern Idaho, extreme northeastern Nevada, extreme northeastern Utah, and southwestern Wyoming, as well as locally from eastern Oregon and southern Montana to northwestern Colorado, portions of western California south to extreme northwestern Baja California, the western Sacramento Valley, and along the western edge of the Sierra Nevada; this species also breeds in Colombia, Ecuador, and Jamaica (Vickery 1996). The grasshopper sparrow winters throughout most of Mexico and the southeastern states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and the Carolinas; in-between these breeding and wintering ranges, the grasshopper sparrow occurs locally as a year-round resident (Vickery 1996). In Idaho, this species is locally abundant wherever suitable habitat occurs throughout the Snake River plain in the south and the Palouse in the north (Groves et al. 1997a), and is estimated to have a population size of approximately 68,000 individuals (Rosenberg 2004).

POPULATION TREND

The grasshopper sparrow is undergoing significant population declines throughout its range; Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data reveal statistically significant declines at the

level of the United States (-3.7% per year), the western U.S. (-6.9% per year), as well as in Idaho (-7.3% per year) during the period 1966–2004 (Sauer et al. 2005). Trend analyses indicate steeper declines during the more recent period of 1980–2004 compared with 1966–1979.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Found in prairies, old fields, open grasslands, cultivated fields, and savannas where this species eats insects, other small invertebrates, grain, and seeds (Groves et al. 1997a). Appears to prefer moderately open grasslands and prairies with patchy bare ground, occupying lush areas with shrub cover in arid grasslands of the west (Vickery 1996). Tends to be extremely shy and secretive; even its song, which is weak and insect-like, makes this species difficult to detect during the breeding season (Burleigh 1972).

ISSUES

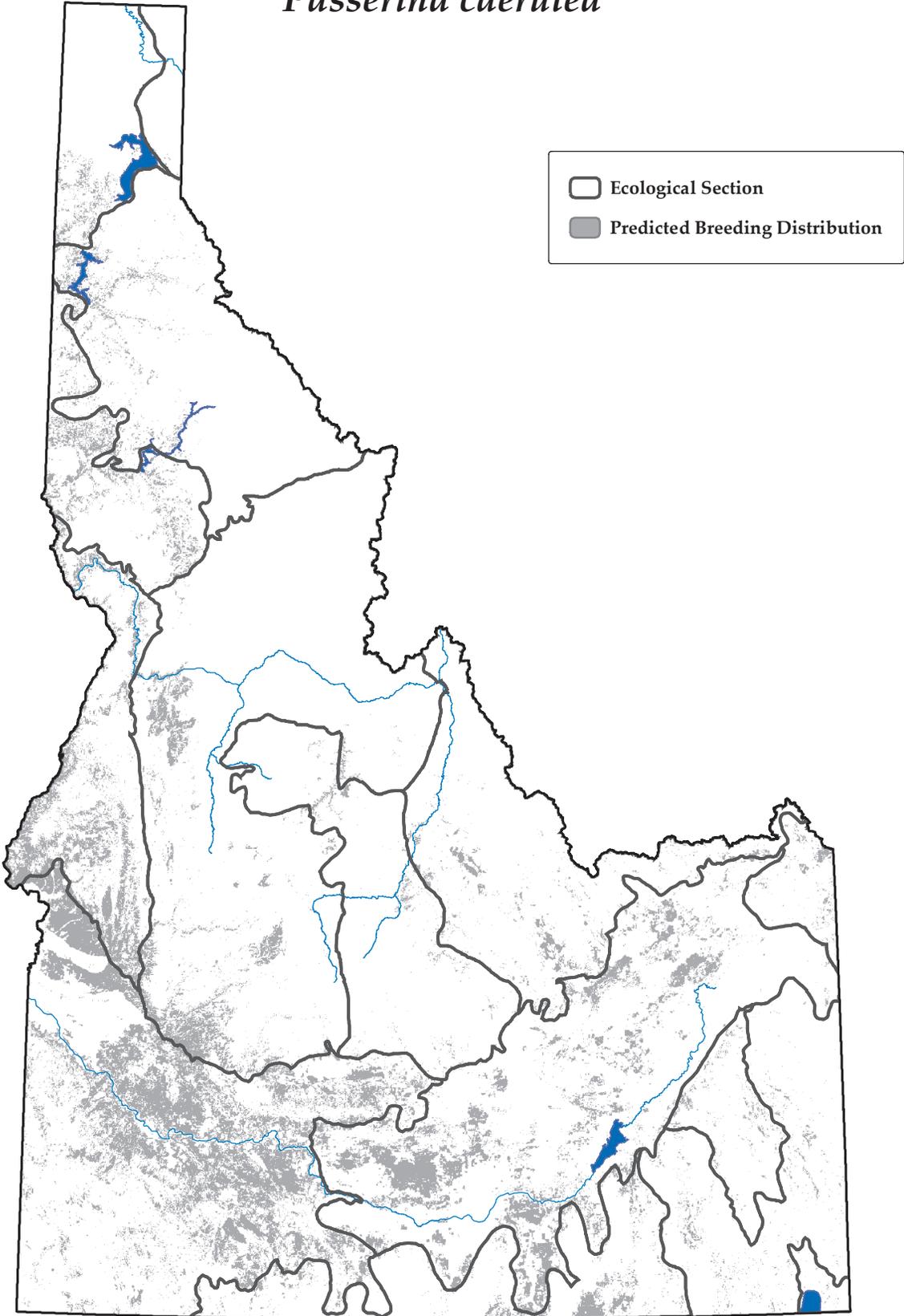
Habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation are the primary reasons for population declines of the grasshopper sparrow in North America (Vickery 1996). Conversion of native grasslands to agricultural land (e.g., on the Palouse) has likely contributed to local and regional population declines. Extensive and intensive grazing in western North America also has had negative impacts on this species (Vickery 1996). Early-season mowing of hayfields and other agricultural lands is responsible for major nest failure of grassland birds in general, including grasshopper sparrows.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Three primary management techniques are recommended to implement conservation actions for the grasshopper sparrow: prescribed burning, grazing, and mowing. Each technique will have different impacts depending on the type of grassland ecosystem. In general, prescribed burns are likely to benefit this species as long as they are sufficiently light to avoid significantly reducing shrub cover (Vickery 1996). Light to moderate grazing also may be beneficial in lush grassland habitats, whereas any amount of grazing on more arid grassland types is likely to be detrimental (Vickery 1996). Because of the deleterious effects of early-season mowing, deferring mowing on both private and public lands would improve breeding opportunities for the grasshopper sparrow and other grassland birds (Vickery 1996); incentives to encourage private landowners to defer mowing should be further explored (e.g., Farm Bill programs).

Grasshopper Sparrow

Passerina caerulea



Map created on September 22, 2005 and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center. Sources: Predicted distribution is from the Wildlife Habitat Relationships Models (WHR), A Gap Analysis of Idaho: Final Report. Idaho Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Moscow, ID (Scott et al. 2002). Predicted distribution is approximate (for more information, go to http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap_report.asp).

