



Featured Species Habitat Management Guidance for Bluebird

Latin Name: *Sialia sialis*

Scope: Upper Peninsula

Rationale - *why we value the species and the problem for the species:*

The eastern bluebird is one of our most beloved songbirds. It is easily recognized, readily watched, and enjoyed by recreationists of all kinds. Michigan's bluebirds have been generally increasing at an average rate of 3.3 % per year between 1966 and 2012, and Upper Peninsula (UP) bluebirds east of Ottawa National Forest have been increasing at an average rate of greater than 1.5 % per year over the same period (Sauer et al. 2014). Past declines are thought to be caused by changes in land-use practices that have allowed openlands to revert back to forest and forest practices that have not favored the production of snags (USDA NRCS 2007).

Habitat Need - *the cause & effect relationship between habitat and species and its primary limiting habitat need:*

The primary threat to eastern bluebird populations is loss of breeding habitat (USDA NRCS 2007). For nesting, bluebirds depend on the presence of cavities and open habitat with sparse or low-growing grasses or forbs (Gowaty and Plissner 1998). Prescribed burning is beneficial because it increases the number of snag and area of forest openings; decreases the thickness of ground cover, understory plants, and mid-story plants; and encourages the production of preferred food plants such as cherry, raspberry, blackberry, serviceberry and blueberry (Pinkowski 1977). Other methods of maintaining forest openings include: timber harvests, mowing, tillage, and grazing/browsing.

Habitat Objectives - *the treatment or management to address the primary limiting habitat need:*

- 1) Maintain or increase the amount of grassy forest openings.
- 2) Protect snags, or dying standing trees associated with openings.
- 3) Existing opening complexes such as oak or pine savanna should, where possible, be managed using prescribed fire.
- 4) Where possible, manage for the production and maintenance of snags.

Priority Geographic Areas - *the specific geographic areas where we should focus management for the species:*

The 6 Regional State Forest Management Plan Management Areas (Baraga Plains, Danaher Kingston Outwash, Menominee End Moraine, Panola Plains, Peavy End Moraines, and Sturgeon Sloughs) and 3 Wildlife project areas (Baraga Plains State Wildlife Management Area (SWMA), Sturgeon River Sloughs SWMA, and Groveland Mine Flooding SWMA), which identify the bluebird as a featured species.

Priority Landscapes - *the landscape, setting, or cover-type where we should focus management within the areas above:*
Grasslands, savannas, barrens and forest openings.

Population Goal - *the goal for the species, its habitat, or a stakeholder's actions:*

Presence in currently occupied opening complexes and re-occupancy of opening that have not been occupied in recent history.

Evaluation Method - *the monitoring method to measure progress towards the goal above:*

- 1) Propose annual surveys for presence of bluebirds at DNR openings within in the priority geographic areas.
- 2) Propose developing transect methods to quantify numbers of bluebirds at DNR managed openings as time and funding allow.

Incidental Species - *other species which may benefit from management for this species:*

Pileated woodpecker; wild turkey; and white-tailed deer.

References - *citation for documents referenced in this guidance:*

- Gowaty, P. A., and J. H. Plissner, 1998. Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*). *In* The Birds of North America, No. 381 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.
- Pinkowski, B.C. 1977. Blowfly parasitism of eastern bluebirds in natural and artificial nest sites. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 41:272-276.
- Sauer, J. R., J. E. Hines, J. Fallon, K. L. Pardieck, D. J. Ziolkowski, Jr., and W. A. Link. 2004. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966 - 2012. Version 02.19.2014. USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD
- USDA NRCS. 2007. - Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 2 - Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), Technical Notes 190-65.