

ISSUE 34: SENSITIVE WILDLIFE

Changes from the Draft to the Final EIS

There were no major changes between Draft and Final EIS. Minor editorial changes were made.

Introduction

This section addresses the potential effects of travel management under the seven alternatives to wildlife species identified as “sensitive.” All Forest Service planned, funded, executed or permitted programs and activities are to be reviewed for possible effects on sensitive species (FSM 2672.4). The following terrestrial species are listed as sensitive on the Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species List and are either known or suspected to occur in one or more of the TPAs: northern goshawk, peregrine falcon, black-backed woodpecker, flammulated owl, Townsend’s big-eared bat, harlequin duck, trumpeter swan and wolverine. For a discussion of the effects of the Travel Plan alternatives on wolverine, see the Wolverine section.

Different species groups respond to disturbance similarly, but uniquely. The development of biologically-sound management guidelines for species require site-specific information regarding species, sensitivity to disturbance, essential habitat, season, topography, vegetation, foraging areas, prey base, roosts, sources of recreational disturbance, cumulative human disturbance and population status.

There is abundant evidence that raptors (including northern goshawk, peregrine falcon, and flammulated owl) in general, are sensitive to disturbances, particularly during the breeding season. Waterfowl (harlequin duck, trumpeter swan) are wary and seek refuge from all forms of disturbance, particularly those associated with loud noise or rapid movement. Species dependent on unique habitats (Townsend’s big eared bat, peregrine falcon) also experience negative impacts with human activity.

Discussion

Due to the temporal and spatial nature of the habitat and life history requirements of these sensitive species, it is difficult to quantify effects. Providing details on changes in motorized and non-motorized routes by alternative would not account for effects from off-route non-motorized recreational activity. There are no restrictions for either on or off-route non-motorized foot and stock use and the type, frequency and location of these activities are not quantifiable or definable.

Modeling is an important tool to display potential habitat and therefore, potential presence of a certain species. However, it does not provide a basis to restrict human activity of any kind because it does not confirm presence or site-specific disturbance mechanisms that may be negatively affecting a species. Mapping known or important habitat components such as nesting, brooding, wintering, foraging or roosting areas is specific to individuals. This may provide information that is helpful to determine what mitigation is necessary, if any, to minimize potential negative impacts on that particular species during specific times in those specific areas. While this strategy may work

for currently known locations (of nesting sites or whatever), it does nothing to protect areas not currently occupied but that have the potential to be occupied, or areas that have not yet been discovered.

An identified management consideration for most of the sensitive species includes restricting human activities during critical times such as breeding seasons. Special closure orders are a tool that can be used to site-specifically manage transportation routes for specific periods of use based on a particular species' annual activity. Generally, however, use of this tool may serve to effectively mitigate yet not unnecessarily restrict public use or access to a particular area.

General Effects

The mere presence of roads represents a direct loss of habitat. Recreationists can affect wildlife through direct disturbance of normal activities either intentionally or unintentionally (Hickman et al. 1999). Intentional activities include target or sport shooting, and legal and illegal trapping or hunting. Unintentional disturbance may include such things as attempting to photograph wildlife, hiking cross-country through specialized habitats or viewing nesting birds, especially when these activities inadvertently interrupt critical life cycle patterns.

Actions having effects on sensitive species can be lumped into two main categories: disturbance-related effects (continued or increased levels of development, recreation, hunting and trapping, etc.) and habitat modification related (non-National Forest lands vegetation management including timber salvage, green timber harvesting, fuels treatment, etc.). Any future federal actions in the project area that are not being considered at this time, including all ground-disturbing activities relative to implementing the decision made on the transportation corridor in this analysis will undergo a separate analysis, based in part on an understanding of the consequences to sensitive wildlife habitat incurred by the proposed travel management plan.

Intuitively, the alternatives with the least amount of roads and trails open to motorized and non-motorized use would have the least impact to those species susceptible to disturbance, due to the reduced chance of human encounters. Both activities, and the relationship to disturbance, are entirely dependent on the coincidence of the activity to the specialized habitat or critical time for that species. The ability to manage recreational activity with special closure orders is critical in protecting species and their habitats.

Special orders are a tool that enables closures to be managed when necessary to limit human activity and timing in an area. The ability to institute a special closure order would be retained under any of the proposed alternatives. Additional mitigation in the form of programmatic language in all action alternatives and proposed monitoring (see Appendix B) would provide the opportunity to better protect critical sites. These management efforts will focus management efforts and allow flexibility when there is need for constraints, limitations or restrictions in recreational activities during critical times in critical habitat areas. The following table summarizes the effects and provides the determination for each considered species.

Table 4.34. 1 Sensitive Species

Species	Anticipated Impact
Northern Goshawk	MIIH – All Alternatives
Peregrine Falcon	MIIH – All Alternatives
Black-backed Woodpecker	MIIH – All Alternatives
Flammulated Owl	MIIH – All Alternatives
Townsend’s Big-eared Bat	NI – All Alternatives
Harlequin Duck	MIIH – All Alternatives
Trumpeter Swan	NI – Alternatives 5, 6 MIIH – Alternatives 1-4, 7-M

MIIH = May impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. NI = No impact.