

R2 Sensitive Species List Recommendation

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella illiaca*)

By Gary Patton

11/6/01

Recommendation: Not R2 SS; but consider for other emphasis species lists

Rationale: The fox sparrow is a widely distributed breeder across Canada, Alaska, and through much of the mountainous and inter-mountain western U.S. It is ranked G5 and N5, and S4 in its primary R2 range in Colorado and Wyoming. While little has been known about fox sparrow distribution and abundance in the Southern Rockies until recently, there is evidence of range expansion. The species is associated with riparian, deciduous, and other shrubby habitats in mesic environments. Because of the drier conditions in R2, this translates most often to riparian and wet meadow shrub habitats. It tolerates and even positively responds to disturbance events that open forest canopy and create shrubby growth and deciduous successional stages in areas of moisture. It's food habitats are fairly broad.

In R2, the species can be vulnerable where riparian and wet meadow shrub communities are lost or degraded. On private land, this may constitute a negative trend. On federally managed land, there is a trend to increased protection for and restoration of riparian and wet meadow shrub habitats. Because the species is most commonly found at higher elevations in willow carr and riparian willow habitats, the largest percentage of the breeding population in the Southern Rockies may be found on federally management land. Overall, based on it's wide range, relative abundance and security, evidence of possible range expansion in the Southern Rockies, and improving habitat conditions on Forest Service managed lands, there does not seem to be a compelling basis to warrant inclusion on the R2 sensitive species list.

Nonetheless, because suitable habitat in R2 is patchy, fox sparrow populations are likewise patchy in distribution and, therefore, vulnerable to habitat degradation. Therefore, on units where populations appear to be stressed or limited by degraded habitat conditions, it may be desirable to consider this species for local management emphasis by those units.