

## **BIRDS, GRAZING, AND RESTORATION IN TALL-WILLOW RIPARIAN COMMUNITIES OF CENTRAL MONTANA**

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Using birds as a tool, the Avian Science Center has been monitoring the effects of several riparian restoration and grazing management projects in Montana. In 2001 and 2003 we surveyed bird populations in tall-willow riparian habitats, primarily east of the continental divide. The goal of this project was to collect and develop information on avian species responses to riparian conditions, to identify the most effective techniques for active riparian management and restoration and the conservation of avian habitats. Tall-willow community types are important avian habitat on east-side forests, and are strongly impacted by grazing practices. Information on changes in vertical structure and cover of shrub layers is especially beneficial in managing these important riparian community types. We surveyed 36 sites on the four participating National Forests; grazed and ungrazed tall-willow riparian sites were categorized based upon the degree of physical evidence of grazing at the site. Although an overall effect of grazing can be clearly seen, important riparian bird species reacted differently to various structural changes. These results, together with ongoing collaborative efforts aimed to enhance the condition of riparian areas, will be used to help develop habitat models, decision support tools, and facilitate adaptive management. We hope this kind of collaboration will continue in more areas in the future.