

**Benton County Prairie Species HCP  
Streaked Horned Lark (STHL) TAC Subcommittee Meeting Minutes  
January 17, 2007**

**Attendees:**

Randy Moore & Doug Robinson, OSU  
Bob Altman, American Bird Conservancy  
Nick Testa, Oregon Department of Transportation  
Ann Kreager, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Carolyn Menke & Michelle Michaud, Institute for Applied Ecology

**I. Introductions**

**II. Purpose/Role of Subcommittee**

**III. Review/Discuss Species Information and Maps**

**A.** Streaked Horned Lark (STHL) Biology-- STHL need a small area for creating their nests, however, they prefer to nest in large open areas, 100+ acres in size. Historically, STHL likely used sandy floodplains, seasonal mudflats, drying vernal pools, and areas burned the previous fall. Landscape context is important. A small tract of suitable habitat (i.e., bare ground, sparsely vegetated) surrounded by trees/forest is not suitable habitat overall. Habitat in agricultural fields is ephemeral, depending on the farming regime. In the Willamette Valley, STHL are affected mainly by vegetation management, agricultural operations, ditch maintenance, and roadside maintenance activities. STHL nests may be close in proximity to one another, and birds only defend a small zone around nests. STHL will forage communally during the breeding season, and almost always do so in the winter. Adults eat primarily seeds and feed insects (including crane fly larvae) to their chicks. The estimated mean lifespan for the STHL is two to four years.

**B.** Known populations of STHL were discussed, including those present at William Finley National Wildlife Refuge (Finley NWR) and the Corvallis Airport property. Linn County has a better landscape for STHL

**C.** Listing Potential--All agreed that the STHL has the potential to be listed as endangered or threatened by the USFWS within the next 15-years, but that the likelihood is greater if the species is lumped with other species in similar habitats. A major impediment to listing is the species "subspecies" status. The Horned Lark is a common bird in North America. Another impediment to listing is that in the Willamette Valley, the STHL's habitat is primarily agricultural fields, which are non-native and ephemeral. Ann Kreager said the only way the species would be listed is if someone petitioned (again) to have the species listed.

**IV. Information Gaps**

**A.** Research Needs--Research needs include determining population recruitment and specific threats in Benton County (e.g., predation).

**B.** Survey Work for 2007, 2008--The subcommittee agreed that available funds would be used for presence/absence surveys in Benton County. Randy Moore agreed to perform the work and will prepare a scope of work. Benton County is requesting USFWS Section

6 HCP Planning Assistance funding for STHL survey work in 2008. If the funds are approved, the money will be used to determine reproductive success of STHL populations in Benton County. Randy Moore is working with WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife on obtaining funding to complete population surveys for STHL rangewide. This study will use a stratified random survey pattern within the range of STHL; work in Benton County would probably be limited. Randy will also be doing survey work for the USFWS at the three Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuges. IAE will set up a meeting to discuss presence/absence surveys on private property in Benton County.

#### **V. Review/Discuss Covered Activities**

**A. Covered Activities**--The following activities were recommended for inclusion: Hunting for other species, Permits issued by Fire Districts for Prescribed Burning, Goats – (grazing activity), Golf courses, including disc golf, Playgrounds, Disking, Emergency management (staging areas, equipment), Disposal sites for landslide materials, Special events parking (e.g., using fields for parking at special events), Ditch maintenance, Runway construction/expansion/maintenance

#### **VI. Discuss draft biological goals/ conservation measures**

**A. Conservation Measures**-- The subcommittee agreed that conservation measures should include limited roadside maintenance during the breeding season (April 15-August 15). STHL may produce two clutches per season, therefore limiting activity through mid August is important. Where STHL may be present, any roadside right of way mowing or spraying should be limited except in the case where required for driver safety. Other possible measures included incentives for landowners to grow crops (e.g. sparse density clover), that could be used by STHL.

The subcommittee agreed that establishing a 100+ acre property to be managed for STHL is an ideal conservation measure for STHL. This could be via acquisition of fee simple or a conservation easement, or management incentive programs. Ann Kreager will work with landowners interested in the Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program (WHCMP) on managing their property for STHL. Property located in the corridor between Corvallis Airport and Finley NWR would be optimal. The site would need continued maintenance, with vegetation management occurring at least every other year. Pea shot gravel has been used on bare ground to prevent vegetation growth. Removal of the top soil to expose the lower clay layer is another option to keep the microsites sparsely vegetated.

Due to the ephemeral nature of the bird's habitat, surveys would need to be completed on a yearly basis for persons wishing to secure a development permit from the County. Surveys conducted during HCP development will not eliminate the need for future surveys, unless habitat is completely unsuitable for STHL.

#### **VII. Public Comment Period.** No public present for comments