

Conserving the Bicknell's Thrush: Stewardship and Management Practices for High Elevation Forest

The following best conservation and management guidelines are provided by Bird Studies Canada to address threats to Bicknell's Thrush habitat caused by both land development and forestry in the Canadian Maritimes. They are provided so that land owners, users and developers can avoid and reduce negative effects on Bicknell's Thrush and its optimal habitat.

Maintain existing Bicknell's Thrush habitat to the degree possible

Bicknell's Thrush optimal habitat in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia can be described as forest with the following characteristics:

- elevation 380 metres or higher
- 30% or more conifer stems
- very high stem density (20,000 to 50,000 stems per hectare)
- tree height over 3 metres

The precautionary approach to land development is recommended when developments are proposed in Bicknell's Thrush optimal habitat. In other words:

- * Developments such as roads, recreational trails, wind farms, and communication towers that involve even minor amounts of land clearing, should avoid areas where Bicknell's Thrush is found.

To determine if Bicknell's Thrush has ever been found in a specific area, contact BSC Atlantic at 506-364-5047 or email generalinfo@birdscanada.org.

If the area slated for development has not been shown to support Bicknell's Thrush in the past but is close to areas that have or recently had Bicknell's Thrush, or falls within the potential habitat range of the species, the precautionary approach should still be followed. It is recommended that BSC personnel, a provincial biologist, or a skilled birder survey the area during the bird breeding season to determine with high certainty the presence or absence of Bicknell's Thrush. If Bicknell's Thrush is found, the area should be avoided.

Maintain areas of optimal industrial Bicknell's Thrush habitat as long as possible



Forestry companies should work with researchers to determine which forest stands meet optimal habitat characteristics for Bicknell's Thrush. Generally, forest stands reach conditions optimal for Bicknell's Thrush 10-15 years after cutting or planting. Surveys should then be conducted to determine which of these stands support Bicknell's Thrush.

- * Industrial forest stands that support Bicknell's Thrush should remain un-thinned until the trees are no longer at a successional stage that is suitable for nesting, as determined by further research.



Avoid clearing, construction and thinning during the breeding season

The Bicknell's Thrush has a low reproductive rate, so every breeding season is invaluable to maintain bird numbers in an already reduced and declining population. Therefore:

- * If clearing, construction and/or thinning in Bicknell's Thrush breeding habitat cannot be avoided, activities should be performed outside of the bird breeding season, before June 1st and after July 31st, to prevent the direct destruction of nests, eggs, nestlings, fledglings or adult birds.

Leave patches of intact forest in cleared and thinned areas

- * When forest clearing and thinning in Bicknell's Thrush breeding habitat cannot be avoided, patches of intact forest should be left whenever possible. These patches should:
 - cover at least one quarter hectare;
 - be located 20 to 50 metres from the uncut or unthinned edge; and
 - contain intact undisturbed underbrush.

Maintain an adequate supply of optimal habitat in the industrial landscape

Long term impacts of pre-commercial thinning on Bicknell's Thrush may not be detrimental provided that excessive amounts of Bicknell's Thrush habitat are not thinned in a single year, and a specific rotation of un-thinned, just thinned and re-grown areas is maintained on the landscape to ensure sufficient breeding habitat. Presently, however, there is a lack of information on how much habitat is currently being used by Bicknell's Thrush in industrial forests, and how much unthinned area is required for the current breeding population to remain stable or increase in size. Until such research is completed, land managers should consider the following guidance:

- * Industrial forest should be managed with a "no net habitat loss" policy such that the amount of Bicknell's Thrush habitat on the landscape remains the same year after year.

This means that forest operators should stagger areas that are to be pre-commercially thinned over time. For example, managers could ensure that for every stand of optimal Bicknell's Thrush habitat which is thinned, an unthinned stand of approximately equal area will reach optimal characteristics (i.e. 10 to 15 years of age) the following year.



For more information, please contact:



Bird Studies Canada – Atlantic Region
PO Box 6227, Sackville, NB E4L 1G6
Phone 506-364-5047
generalinfo@bsc-eoc.org