Monitoring Birds of Forested Wetlands – In Forested Wetlands!

Forested wetlands represent a unique and imperiled habitat in the WGCPO that supports area-sensitive breeding birds, such as Acadian Flycatcher, Kentucky Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Prothonotary Warbler, and numerous others. Due to steady declines in population estimates many of these are Partners in Flight Watchlist Species [https://www.partnersinflight.org/resources/pif-watch-list-table-2016/], and Species of Greatest Conservation Need [https://www1.usgs.gov/csas/swap/] according to state conservation plans.

The primary source of population data for these species is the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). Whereas BBS has the advantage of a long, established history, numerous contributors, and wide geographic coverage, survey routes tend to infrequently intersect forested wetland habitat in the WGCPO. In Northeast Texas <10% of established BBS sampling mileage (i.e., approximately 17.4 mi across 11 routes) intercepts primary or secondary floodplain habitats.

LMVJV Office and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department staff are collaborating on a pilot effort in Northeast Texas to augment BBS efforts by better sampling breeding birds of forested wetlands using survey routes positioned within rivers. A survey team is comprised of a pair of biologists (one observer, one recorder), each in a kayak. Teams record bird detections by sight and sound for three minutes within river segments with pre-designated starting points.
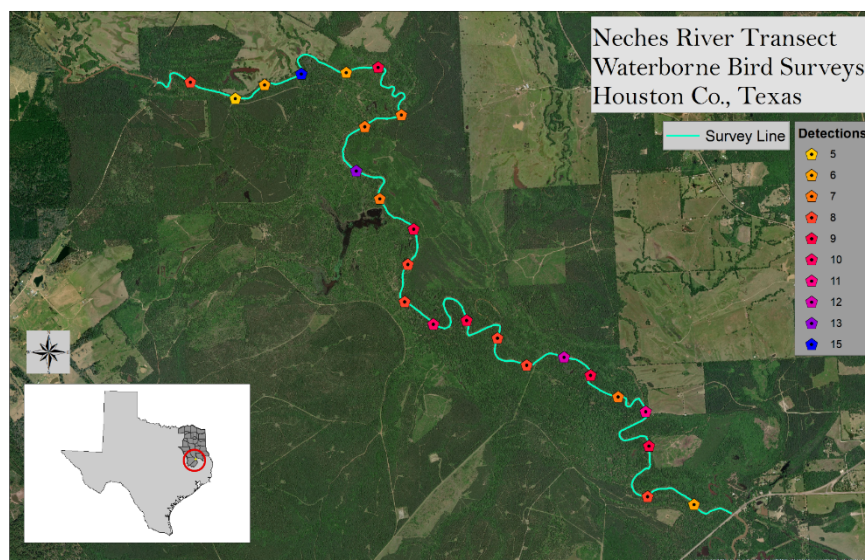
Protocols (e.g., use of CyberTracker software, put-in/take-out locations, etc.) were refined through the 2017 and 2018 field seasons, resulting in point count data collected from portions of four rivers (Angelina, Big Cypress, Little Cypress, Neches), May 23- June 19 (total of 112 three-minute sampling segments).

With a full season of collection anticipated in 2019, partners hope to utilize these data as the basis for population status and trend analysis, and to test assumptions of the LMVJV WGCPO Forested Wetland Bird Plan's Decision Support Tool/Habitat Suitability model.