



Working Lands, Conservation and Cooperation: Agricultural Grasslands and Grassland Birds in Ontario, Canada

America's Grasslands Conference
November 14 - 16, 2017
Fort Worth, Texas

Paul Smith

Outline

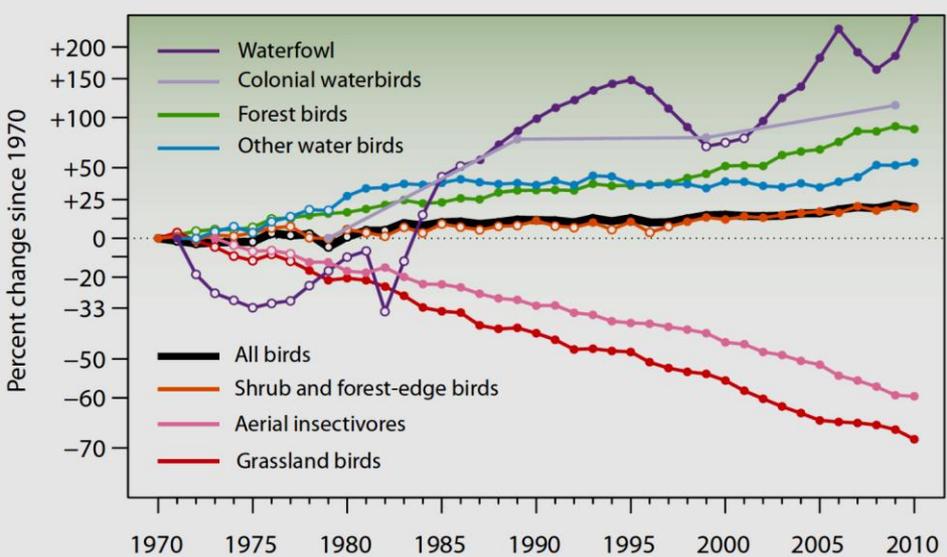
- Grasslands and grassland birds in Ontario
- Changing nature of agriculture influencing supply of “grasslands”
 - Livestock, hay, pasture
- New Endangered Species legislation
- Controversy and consensus building
- Compromise approach
- Changing attitudes & lessons learned





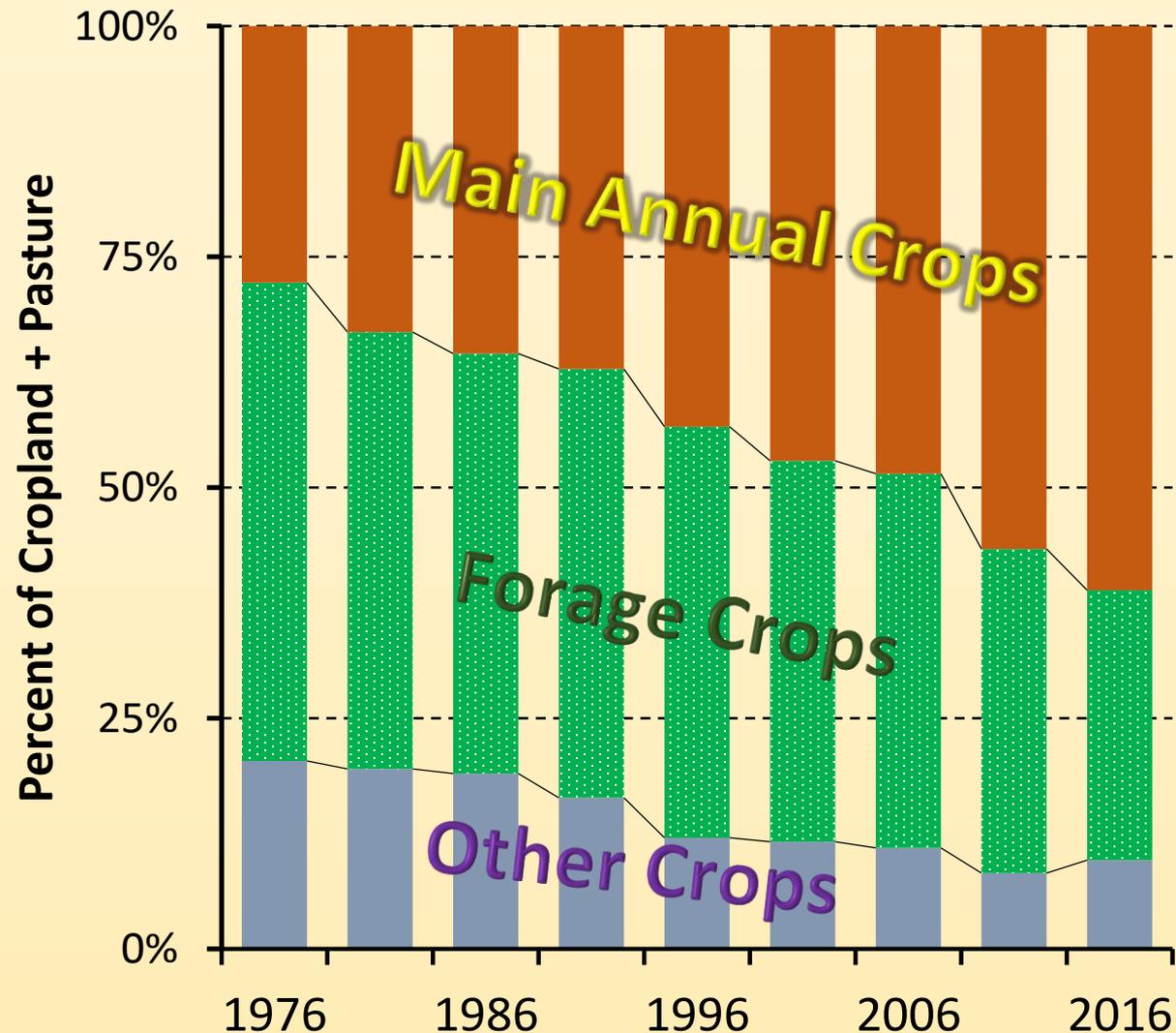
Grassland birds in Ontario

- Bobolink
 - Eastern Meadowlark
 - Savannah Sparrow
 - Grasshopper Sparrow
 - Upland Sandpiper
 - Vesper Sparrow
 - Loggerhead Shrike
-
- Dependent on perennial forage crops for habitat
 - Many grassland birds declining in North America and Europe



Changing Agriculture

- Increasing annual crops, soybeans, corn
- Decreasing perennial forages, hay and pasture
- Declining cattle numbers
- High land prices
- Modest returns for beef producers
- Annual crop prices

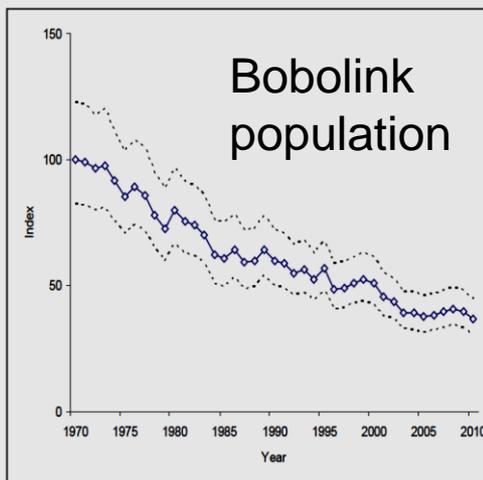


New Endangered Species Act in 2007

- New provincial Endangered Species Act 2007, proclaimed 2008.
- Emphasizes science in identifying species at risk.
- Employs a unique legislative structure.
- Government appointed Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario determines the status of species.
- Legal listing through a regulation filed after Committee decides on the status (“automatic” listing).
- No ministerial or Cabinet input into species listing - no public consultation on listing of species.
- Legal habitat and species protection then “automatically” kicks in

Bobolink & Eastern Meadowlark designated Threatened

- Bobolink & Eastern Meadowlark nest in hay and pasture May-July.
- Estimated Ontario population of Bobolink is 570,000 (2010) birds and Eastern Meadowlark is 130,000 (2010).
- Pre-European settlement, both species had limited populations in Ontario.
- Populations declined significantly since 1960s.
- **Bobolink** designated a threatened species in 2010.
- **Eastern Meadowlark** designated a threatened species in 2012.



The Issues

- Nesting period for the Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark overlaps with normal hay harvesting and grazing activities (May to mid-July).
- Fear was that habitat protections might prevent harvest and grazing
 - Over 30,000 Ontario farmers grow forages on about 1.5 million hectares.
 - Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark may nest on thousands of farms.
 - Thousands of farm and non-farm landowners potentially affected.
- Nutritional value of late harvest hay and pasture is much lower
- Economic impact of reduced production with lower quality forages
- Future potential of land for development might be compromised (important for non-farm landowners)



Farmers grapple with balancing agriculture and protecting the bobolink

NEWS Mar 15, 2012 by [Mary Riley](#) Peterborough This Week



MNR explores long term exemption for agriculture from habitat protection provisions

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The Facts on the Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark Designation as Species at Risk

Gerald Rollins, Ontario Cattleman's Association
The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has recognized the role agriculture plays in providing habitat for bobolink and eastern meadowlark, and the conflict this causes between habitat conservancy efforts and normal farming practices. In recognition of the need to balance the protection of these birds with the interests of Ontario farmers, the Ontario government has granted protection a three-year exemption to current bobolink species and habitat protection provisions under the Endangered Species Act until October 31, 2014 and has proposed that the eastern meadowlark be added to this exemption. This exemption is in place for agricultural

Jean Crews and Jon McCracken from Bird Studies Canada.

Gerald Rollins (OCA Director) sits on this advisory group for the Ontario Cattleman's Association.

OCA is concerned about the lack of detail outlining options for stewardship programs and compliance incentives to be tied



Threatened songbird leaves Ontario developers with uncertain future



Ontario farmers to receive extended reprieve from bobolink and eastern meadowlark habitat protection terms

AgMedia Inc. April 25, 2015 MANN

Landowners want input on wildlife protection

Alberta association urges federal government to consider rural residents when making changes to Species at Risk Act

BY BARBARA DUCKWORTH CALGARY BUREAU

EDMONTON — Canada's Species

tively affect rural landowners, the association should work with the other levels of government to show that rural landowners can contribute

SARA (Species at Risk Act) policies are open for public comment until March 31 on critical habitat nominations and federal land

where the loss and degradation of native prairie has proven detrimental to some of the most sensitive species," he told the board

recovery strategy established a plan for all herds across Canada. "Each caribou range would need to be 65 percent of the original

Response

- 2011: Temporary exemption from species protection to allow normal farming activities
- 2011: Set up Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark Round Table – a multi-stakeholder advisory committee
 - provide advice and recommendations on ways to protect the species and their habitat, while still allowing agricultural operations to continue
- 2013: Species Recovery strategy completed
- 2013: Round Table recommendations released
 - Proposed package of stewardship incentives, research and monitoring, education and outreach, with 10-year exemption extension
- 2015: Final decision:
 - Package of initiatives including education, incentives and research
 - Grasslands Stewardship Initiative is key commitment (not yet implemented)
 - Regulatory amendment extended agricultural exemption to 2025



Bobolink/E. Meadowlark Round Table



- Government set up Bobolink Round Table.
 - Representatives from: agriculture, conservation organizations, development industry and renewable energy and aggregate sectors.
 - Co-chaired by President of Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Bird Biologist from Bird Studies Canada.
- Advised on stewardship opportunities, best management practices, outreach/education and directing applied research.
- Compromise and consensus-building was needed.
- Reach consensus while agriculture exemption in place.
- Government staff provided advisory and secretariat support to the round table.



Roundtable Recommendations

- Key recommendations made in 2013 including:
 - extend agricultural exemption for 10 years;
 - “robust” financial incentives to maintain and/or create grassland habitats;
 - monitoring and research to address important knowledge gaps; and
 - education and outreach for key stakeholders.
- Report provides many of the elements for Government to act on through response to Species Recovery Strategy.
- The report provided rationale for extending agricultural exemption.
- Report released for public comment.

Agri-Environmental Stewardship Programs

- Federal and provincial funding for agricultural species at risk initiatives
- Farm organizations as delivery agent for these initiatives
 - Species-at-Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP)
 - Grassland Habitat Farm Incentive Program (GHFIP)
 - Species at Risk Partnership on Agricultural Lands (SARPAL)
- Helps deliver on promise of voluntary stewardship education and incentives
- Numerous projects to benefit Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark



Farming with Grassland Birds

A guide to making your hay and pasture bird friendly



GET UP TO \$20,000
cost-share funding with the
Species At Risk Farm Incentive Program.

*Benefit
more
with*
SARFIP

Changing attitudes

- Growing knowledge and interest in species-at-risk among some farmers
- Evolution of thinking in approaches to legislation
- Stewardship funding from governments
- Farm organizations promoting species at risk programs
- All contribute to changing attitudes and social norms
- Example of the importance of multi-stakeholder consensus-building



Summary



- New Endangered Species legislation in Ontario in 2007
- Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark designated threatened species in 2010 and 2012.
- In Ontario, grassland bird species largely dependent on agricultural forage crop production grown for livestock feed.
- Pasture and hay acreages and cattle numbers in Ontario declined due to changes in agricultural production and markets.
- Designation of the species as threatened caused concern among Ontario forage and livestock producers and landowners.
- Stakeholders and government worked together to conserve species, allow normal farm practices and encourage voluntary stewardship.
- Government funding for species at risk stewardship delivered by farm organization.
- Attitudes are shifting among some farmers regarding species-at-risk.
- Illustrates the challenges of conservation of grassland species dependent on working lands.

