

Bobolink Management Areas

Existing Management Direction

OSMP's goal of integrating agricultural management practices that support nesting habitat for bobolinks was established in the Grassland Ecosystem Management Plan (Grassland Plan). To this end, a select number of hayfields were to be identified that management was to be adjusted on, and mowing delayed until after bobolink fledging, July 15 unless otherwise determined by monitoring. However at the time the Grassland Plan was in development, complicated land use prevented the designation of enough hayfields to meet the standard identified in the Grassland Plan. The Agricultural Plan will pick up where the Grassland Plan left off, and identify a sufficient number of hayfields to be managed for bobolink nesting habitat to meet the standard identified in the Grassland Plan.

Class A Bobolink Management Areas

Class A Bobolink Management Areas are hayfields that are refrained from mowing every year until after bobolink fledging, July 15 unless otherwise determined by monitoring. Through the Grassland Plan, four top-tier hayfields were designated as Class A Bobolink Management Areas. No changes to the Class A Management Areas are proposed.

Class A Bobolink Management Areas			
Property	Field	Acres	Bobolink Habitat Rating
Church	355	96	Low ¹
Burke II	263	54	High
Van Vleet	315	92	Medium
Van Vleet	331	25	Very High

¹ Although Church 355 has a low density of bobolinks, it consistently supports one of the greatest numbers of individuals.

Bobolink Nesting Habitat

Bobolinks are ground-nesting songbirds that originally nested in tallgrass or mixedgrass prairie, but because of land conversion, have now increased their use of irrigated hayfields. Unfortunately, due to their affinity to breed late in the summer, haying/mowing often occurs before the young birds have left the nest. Biologists have documented a 90-100% failure rate of bobolink nests because of hayfield mowing. The consensus is that postponing mowing until July 15 allows for the majority of fledglings to be able to sustain flight and hence avoid mowing impacts. This use of hayfields as nesting habitat creates a potential management conflict as most operators would like to maximize yields, which translates to several harvests (i.e. mowings) each season.

Bobolinks are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and are considered "vulnerable to extirpation: ('S3B") by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program and "rare breeding species" by the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan.

Class B Bobolink Management Areas

*Class B Bobolink Management Areas are hayfields that are not mowed until after bobolink fledging, **one year out of three**. Fourteen hayfields were identified as candidates for Class B Bobolink Management Areas in the Grassland Plan; five were ultimately designated. The other nine remained as candidates due to the aforementioned complicated land use and prioritization of agricultural use. The standard set in the Grassland Plan was to manage 75% of the 14 hayfields (10.5 fields) as Class B Bobolink Management Areas in a given year.*

Staff chose to re-evaluate the Class B Management Areas (designated areas and candidates) identified in the Grassland Plan to take advantage of new information, informing staff of other OSMP hayfields with higher abundance and densities of singing male bobolinks, and reduce the complexities associated with tracking different fields each year. Using the new data, OSMP selected 18 fields, totaling 301 acres² to be designated as Class B Bobolink Management Areas (figure 1). The recommendations increase the land being managed as Class B Bobolink Management Areas from 172 to 301 acres. The recommendations aimed to cluster the fields so as to provide larger and contiguous habitat blocks.

Class B Bobolink Management Areas			
Property	Field	Acres	Bobolink Habitat Rating
Lewis	245*	4	Absent
Lewis	244*	13	Very High
Lewis	251*	10	High
Lewis	256	13	Very High
Baseline & 75 th	265*	10	Very High
Baseline & 75 th	267*	19	High
Baseline & 75 th	280	10	Very High
Baseline & 75 th	283	9	High
Baseline & 75 th	285	13	High
Deluca	14	27	High
Deluca	13	32	Very High
Deluca	19	18	Very High
Hester	18	25	Medium
Campbell	459	29	High
Swartz	254	8	Very High
Swartz	250	15	High
Swartz	247	17	High
Spicer	260	29	Low
Standard: 100% of Class B Bobolink Management areas mowed one year out of three after July 15 annually.			

* The entirety of Baseline & 75th 265 and 267 are to be managed as Class B until conversion of the northern 12 acres. After conversion, Lewis 251, 244, and 245 are to be added to the Class B management area.

² Staff determined that because the size of the fields varies significantly, acres would be a better measure. Staff determined a target range of acres by summing the largest 10.5 fields and smallest 10.5 fields of the Grassland Plan Candidate B fields; the target range is 223-316 acres.

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At a Glance: (summary statistics)

- Bobolinks have been observed on approximately 74% (n=2372 acres) of OSMP monitored sites from 2010-2014³

Lands Designated as Class A or B			
Density	Total Acres	Acres Designated Class A or B	% Designated Class A or B
Very High	214	183	85%
High	201	124	62%
Medium	400	117	30%
Low	1558	125	8%

- Implementation of the diversified vegetable farming recommendations will result in 142 acres of hayfields with a presence of bobolinks being converted to diversified vegetable farming.

Lands Recommended for Diversified Vegetable Farming		
Density	Total Acres	% of land in density class
Very High	3 (Baseline & 75 th)	1%
High	9 (Baseline & 75 th)	4%
Medium	27 (St. Wallburga)	7%
Low	103	7%

³ Sites monitored for bobolinks include hayfields and semi-native grasslands.

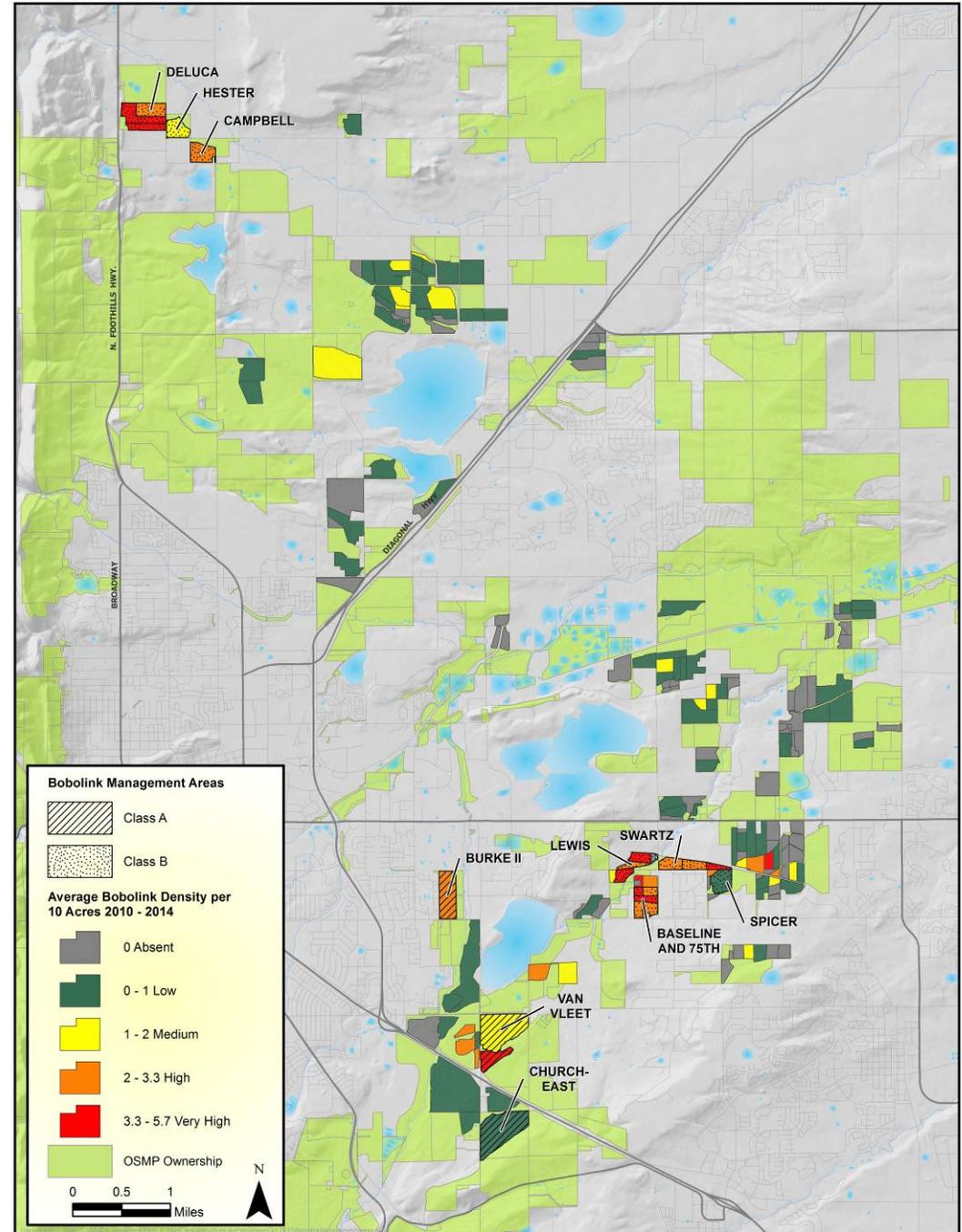


Figure 1: Class A and B Bobolink Management Areas & Bobolink Density