

# GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

## It's About Habitat, Biodiversity, and Partnerships!



### Golden-winged Warblers in Crisis

The Golden-winged Warbler, *Vermivora chrysoptera*, is a Neotropical migratory songbird that breeds in eastern North America from the Appalachian Mountains in the southeastern USA to southern Manitoba. It overwinters in Central America (Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama) and South America (Colombia and Venezuela).

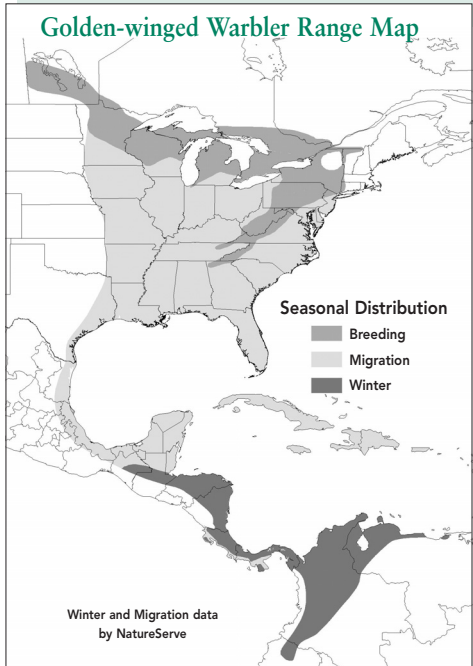
#### POPULATIONS IN DECLINE

Over the last 40 years, Golden-winged Warbler populations have declined rangewide by 3.1% per year with declines up to 16% per year in some states (USGS Breeding Bird Survey). This decline is partially attributed to loss of breeding habitat due to forest maturation. Contributing factors may include migratory/winter habitat loss, hybridization with the Blue-winged Warbler, and global climate change.

Currently, the Golden-winged Warbler is federally listed as Threatened in Canada. It is State listed as Endangered in IN, OH, MA, and GA, Threatened in KY, and a conservation priority in 12 other states.

#### HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Golden-winged Warbler community type preferences vary by region. Management activities for breeding habitat should be focused in forest landscapes near existing populations and above 2000 ft. elevation in the Appalachian Mountains. On the wintering grounds, high elevation forests (Central America: 2300-7200 ft., South America: 4900-8500 ft.) are particularly important.



The Golden-winged Warbler breeds in forested landscapes on sites with open-canopy and dense woody vegetation interspersed with grassy or herbaceous vegetation patches, often including a forested edge. Historically, this habitat was maintained or created by natural disturbance (fire, wind, flooding, beaver activity). Today, human-caused disturbances play an important role in management.

### HABITAT TYPES USED

#### Breeding Areas:

- Young forests
- Open oak woodlands
- Mature aspen forests with canopy openings
- Pine-oak barrens
- Oak savannahs
- Old fields
- Shrub wetlands
- Beaver wetlands
- Mountain balds
- Utility rights-of-way
- Reclaimed strip mines

#### Winter Areas in Latin America:

- Cloud and premontane humid forests
- Montane, dry oak forests
- Regenerating forests
- Riparian forests
- Shade coffee plantations
- Forest edges and open areas with scattered trees

#### On Migration:

Little is known though a greater variety of habitat types seem to be used than other times of the year including mature, closed-canopy forests.

### BREEDING HABITAT MANAGEMENT

#### General Principles

- Manage for desirable vegetation structure (more important than composition of specific plant species),
- Rotationally manage several sites, fields, or stands in close proximity to maintain appropriate habitat as a component of an area through time.
- Discourage habitat manipulation (e.g. utility right-of-way maintenance, timber harvest, burning) during peak nesting times for most birds (May-July).
- Where possible, allow natural disturbances to maintain habitat.

#### Prescribed Burning

Conduct prescribed burning on a 5-7 year rotation such that only a portion of any one site will be burned each year to sustain Golden-winged Warbler populations over time.

#### Grazing

- In the Appalachians, graze one head of cattle per 5-10 acres during the growing season. Higher intensity grazing (up to 1 head/acre) is acceptable during the summer (preferably after July 1) for less than 2 months.
- On high elevation sites, winter and early spring grazing can help set-back woody vegetation.

#### Forest and Shrub Wetland Harvesting

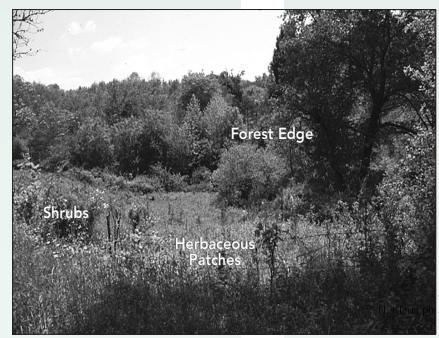
- Where appropriate, use even-aged management practices, leave seed trees, and retain scattered hardwoods/conifers in aspen and oak-chestnut forests to open the canopy with protection of wetland soils from machinery impact.
- Strip-cutting shrub wetlands perpendicular to open water and on a 20-year rotation will stimulate new growth and create more varied, patchy structure. Only use heavy machinery when the soil is dry or frozen.

#### Utility Rights-of-Way (ROW)

Promote ROW management that encourages native shrubs with grassy/herbaceous patches but not large tree establishment.

#### Reclaiming Disturbed Sites (e.g. strip mines, gravel pits, ROW)

If exotic vegetation is problematic, plant native warm and cool season grasses with forbs and a woody shrub component.



Old field-forest mosaic habitat with typical habitat elements labeled.



### HABITAT PROTECTION

- Protect habitat with known breeding populations from human-caused development and degradation in the eastern US and Canada.
- Protect wetland shrub communities from human-caused hydrologic changes, filling for development, and permanent removal by landowners in protected riparian buffer zones. In particular, protect large wetland shrub complexes of northwestern WI and northeastern MN. Alder or willow-dominated wetlands that are relatively flat and sprawling may be preferred over narrow riparian strips with steep grades.
- Protect forests on the wintering grounds from deforestation for row-crop agriculture, pasture, and rural housing expansion. Promote forest restoration (reforestation) to expand protected habitat.

### Biodiversity

Many wildlife species that are declining will benefit from Golden-winged Warbler habitat management and land protection activities. The species shown on the front of this poster are the White-lored Warbler (Threatened endemic of Colombia), Bog Turtle, Prairie Warbler, American Woodcock, and New England Cottontail representing just a few of many species of conservation concern like the Golden-winged Warbler that share the same habitat. Let's protect the diversity of life, the joy of watching these creatures, and the role they play in our ecosystems.

On the wintering grounds, many rare and endangered species are associated with the same habitat used by Golden-winged Warblers. Protection and restoration of this habitat can aid the critically endangered Gorgeted Wood-quail, Chestnut-capped Piha, Colorful Puffleg, and other rare and endemic birds.

### Become a Partner

Managing and protecting habitat is critical to the future of these animals. Many organizations and agencies have joined the effort to stop the decline. Collaboration with the North American Bird Conservation Initiative and other single-species conservation initiatives for American Woodcock, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, New England Cottontail, and other declining species with overlapping habitat needs can optimize use of limited financial and time resources.

Your participation is needed. Please contact the Golden-winged Warbler Working Group and Alianza alas Doradas (our wintering grounds partners) for more information and to become a partner.



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