

MANAGEMENT FOR HENSLOW'S SPARROWS (*AMMODRAMUS HENSLOWI*) AT GREAT RIVER BLUFFS STATE PARK IN SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA

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Abstract: Great River Bluffs State Park contains old-field habitat dominated by brome grass (*Bromus inermis*) along with scattered native prairie forbs. Two old-field areas in the park have traditionally been used by Henslow's sparrows. Local birders reported near-absence of the species starting in 1991. In 1994, formal census of the fields confirmed their absence. The grass appeared in poor condition with short, yellowish plants with no seed production. Smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*) invasion of the fields was also extensive. State Parks personnel initiated efforts to restore the habitat in 1994 with late-season burning in portions of the fields. In 1995, the vegetation showed significant response with thick growth and extensive seed production. Sumac stands were thinned by manual cutting. In 1996, 10 territories of Henslow's sparrow males were documented. Only one territory was occupied in 1997 and none were present in 1998. In June 1998, portions of the fields were fertilized to increase vigor of the old-field vegetation. Additional portions of the fields were subjected to late-season burning. Five territories were occupied in 1999. Since 2000, between 9 and 27 persistent territories (mean = 16.5) have been documented each year. In 2007, mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) stalks were tested against wooden stakes and sumac stalks to determine preference as singing perches. Mullein was preferred over the other choices with 101, 35, and 0 visits to mullein, sumac stalks, and wooden stakes, respectively. The overall management scheme of infrequent late-season burning, fertilization, removal of sumac, and placement of mullein perches has been successful in sustaining this population.