Effectiveness of buffers for at-risk forest birds

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Buffers for Species at Risk (SAR) forest birds are intended to conserve habitat, allowing birds to persist despite nearby disturbance, such as harvesting during the non-breeding season. Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) for SAR forest birds in the context of forestry were developed and field-tested on crown forestry lands between 2021 and 2025. BMPs for forested wetland SAR birds include buffers around their habitat. In Cape Breton, Port Hawkesbury Paper applied two types of buffers for two forested wetland SAR: Canada Warbler (CAWA) and Olive-sided Flycatcher (OSFL). The two buffer types were a 25-m no-harvest buffer around bird locations and a surrounding 75-m buffer where harvest prescriptions followed species-specific BMPs. Results showed that the no-harvest buffers were effective in maintaining CAWAs after harvest but were less effective for OSFLs. Neither SAR was observed using areas within the BMP buffers. No-harvest buffers were also effective for these two SAR during Medway Community Forest Cooperative (MCFC) harvests in Kespukwitk. A somewhat different approach was taken for a third SAR, the Eastern Wood-Pewee (EAWP) at a MCFC harvest block. MCFC applied no-harvest buffers around bird locations and incorporated BMPs across much of the site. This harvest not only maintained EAWP but apparently improved habitat quality because the number of pairs increased each year post-harvest. Possible reasons for different results among the three SAR will be discussed, drawing upon insights obtained for these SAR at control sites and naturally-disturbed sites. Recommendations will be made for future applications of buffers for these SAR in Kespukwitk.

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