



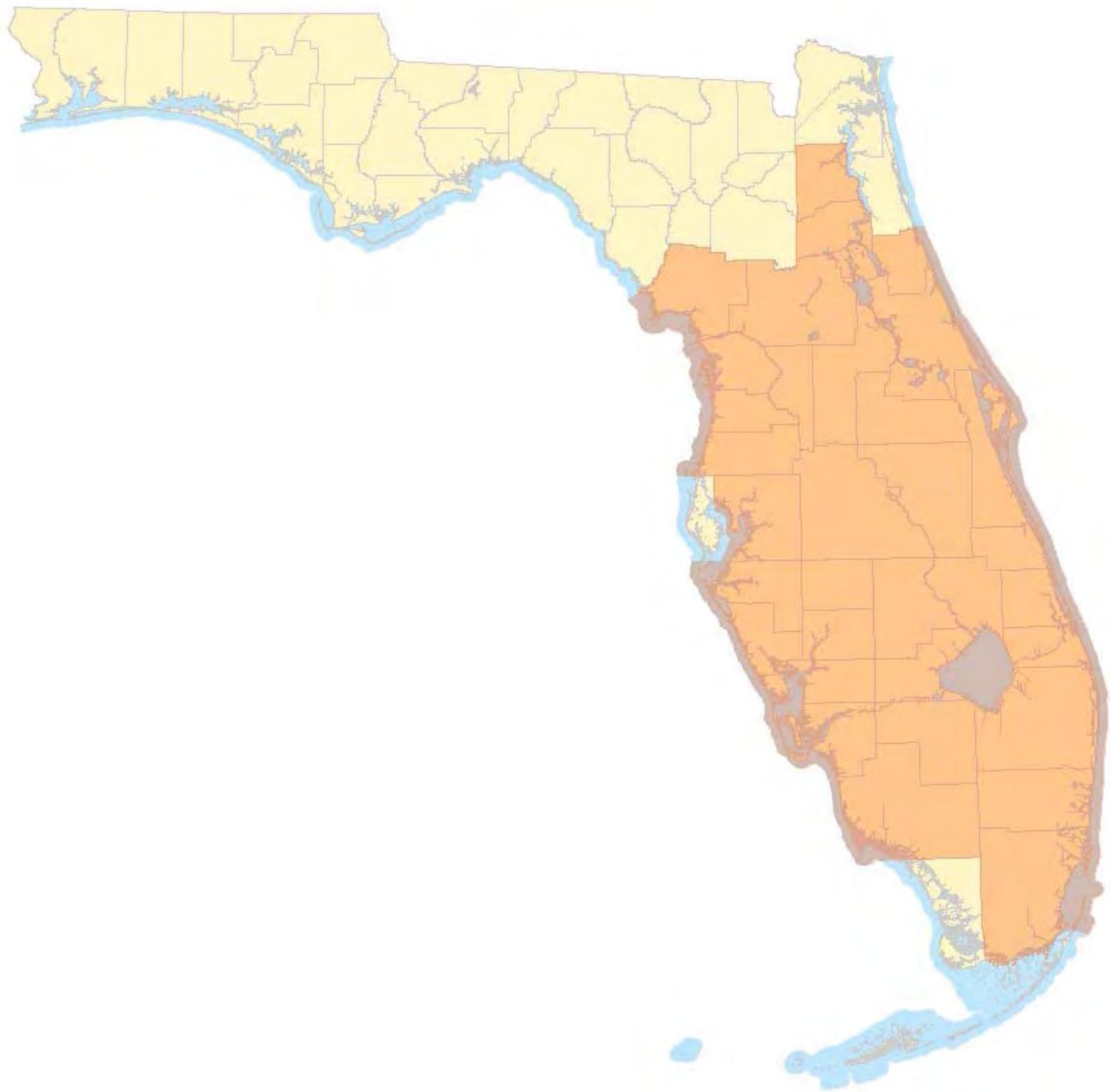
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(SPGP V-R1)**

Attachment 20
Scrub Jay Habitat.

Florida Scrub Jay

Map shows County boundaries (data downloaded from <http://ecos.fws.gov>)



problems in some areas. This rule implements the protection and recovery provisions of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, for the Florida scrub jay.

DATES: The effective date of this rule is July 6, 1987.

ADDRESSES: The complete file for this rule is available for inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the Endangered Species Field Station, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2747 Art Museum Drive, Jacksonville, Florida 32207.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. David J. Wesley, Field Supervisor, at the above address (telephone 904/791-2580 or FTS 946-2580).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Florida scrub jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens coerulescens*) was originally named by Bosc, 1795, as *Corvus coerulescens*. The species *Aphelocoma coerulescens* is widely distributed in the western United States, but the Florida subspecies, *Aphelocoma coerulescens coerulescens*, an isolated form of the species, is restricted to scrub habitat areas of peninsular Florida. The Florida scrub jay is a 30 centimeter (12 inch), bluish-colored, crestless jay totally lacking the white-tipped wings and tail feathers of the more common and widespread blue jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*). A necklace of blue feathers separates the white throat from the grayer underparts, and a white line over the eye often blends into a whitish forehead. The tail is long and loose in appearance (Woolfenden in Kale 1978). The subspecies has been recorded only once from outside of peninsular Florida, on Jekyll Island, Georgia (Moore 1975).

The following information on the biology of the Florida scrub jay is abstracted from Cox (1984) and Woolfenden and Fitzpatrick (1984). Scrub jays are long-lived (10 years or more), sedentary, permanently monogamous inhabitants of oak scrub. They typically nest at the edge of an oak thicket, near an open area. Scrub jays rarely breed at one year of age, even though they are then physiologically mature; instead they may remain on their natal territories for a number of years and assist their parents in raising further broods. Scrub jay breeding pairs with helpers have significantly greater reproductive success than pairs without helpers. Males may remain with their parents as helpers for longer periods (up to six years) than females. As the group's size increases, the territory grows. Eventually, a male helper may be able to claim part of the enlarged

territory for his own breeding territory. Females rarely help for more than two years, and disperse within the local population as breeding vacancies arise. Scrub jays are omnivorous, eating almost anything they can catch, but they concentrate on lizards and arthropods in spring and summer, and acorns in fall and winter. Surplus acorns are frequently cached in the ground.

The Florida scrub jay lives only in the Florida scrub habitat, which occurs on fine, white, well drained sands. This type of sand occurs along the present coastline of Florida, and on inland dunes deposited during the past when sea levels were much higher than at present. The most important of these dune systems include the Atlantic coastal ridge along the Atlantic coast of Florida, the Lake Wales Ridge in Polk and Highlands Counties, and the extensive sand dunes of Ocala National Forest. Cox (1984) stated that the most commonly occupied jay habitat is "oak scrub." Oak scrub consists of a single layer of evergreen shrubs, usually dominated by three species of oaks—myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*), sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*), and Chapman oak (*Quercus chapmani*). Scrub jays are rarely found as residents in habitat with more than 50% canopy cover that is over 3 meters (10 feet tall). In summary, scrub jay habitat consists of dense thickets of scrub oaks less than 3 meters in height, interspersed with bare sand for foraging and storing acorns.

Scrub jays have been reported in the past from scrub habitat in each of the following Florida Counties: Alachua, Brevard, Broward, Charlotte, Citrus, Clay, Collier, Dade, De Soto, Dixie, Duval, Flagler, Gilchrist, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Indian River, Lake, Lee, Levy, Manatee, Marion, Martin, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Putnam, St. Johns, St. Lucie, Sarasota, Seminole, Sumter, and Volusia. Today, scrub jays have been completely eliminated from Broward, Dade, Duval, Pinellas, and St. Johns Counties, and their numbers have decreased drastically in Brevard, Highlands, Orange, Palm Beach, and Seminole Counties. In virtually every county where the species occurs, it is known to have declined in numbers. It has disappeared from fully 40% of the locations from which it was known historically, and the total population has probably dropped by half in the past century (Cox 1984). The major cause of the jay's population decline and its disappearance from specific sites is habitat destruction. The total number of Florida scrub jays estimated by Cox to

survive in Florida today is between 15,000 and 22,000 birds, of which about 13,000 to 20,000 are on public lands, and about 2,000 on private property.

On March 16, 1984, Jeffrey A. Cox, Florida State Museum, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, petitioned the Service to list the Florida scrub jay as a threatened species. Dr. Cox provided a comprehensive report on the status of this species in support of the petition. The Service found on May 4, 1984, that the petitioned action may be warranted and published the finding on July 13, 1984 (49 FR 28584). A 12-month finding was made on March 18, 1985, and published on July 18, 1985 (50 FR 24238), that the action requested was warranted but precluded by work on other pending proposals. Publication of the proposed rule to list the Florida scrub jay as threatened, published in the *Federal Register* (51 FR 18627) on May 21, 1986, constituted the next and final 12-month finding for the Florida scrub jay, as required under section 4(b)(3)(c)(i) of the Act, that the petitioned action is warranted.

Summary of Comments and Recommendations

In the May 1986, proposed rule, and associated notifications, all interested parties were requested to submit factual reports or information that might contribute to the development of a final rule. Appropriate State agencies, county governments, Federal agencies, scientific organizations, and other interested parties were contacted and requested to comment. Newspaper notices were published in the *Orlando Sentinel* on June 15, 1986, and the *Palm Beach Post* on June 14, 1986, which invited general public comment. Twenty-one comments were received, none of which opposed the action. A summary of substantive comments is presented below.

Tom Webber, Biologist, the Florida State Museum, Gainesville, wrote that he resurveyed some of the scrub jay populations that Jeffrey A. Cox censused in 1981. He found that the picture of overall decline remains: of the five northernmost populations (in Clay and Putnam Counties), four have disappeared since 1981, and the fifth has been reduced to one bird. Other populations that have held out since 1981 are often in places where their habitat will probably be destroyed soon and irreversibly.

Theodore O. Hendrickson urged the Service to perhaps consider a category "more urgent" than "threatened" for this bird. Because the scrub jay is still fairly widespread in distribution in Florida,