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Woodpecker Habitat Plan Hatched

Jill Zeman, Associated Press

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Aug. 24, 2007 — Federal wildlife officials say spending more than \$27 million to research the suspected habitat of the [ivory-billed woodpecker](#) is worth the cost, despite conflicting views on whether the elusive bird even exists.

"There's enough out there that we've got to keep searching," said Jeff Fleming, a spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "It'd be irresponsible not to."

The agency this week released a 185-page draft plan aimed at preventing the extinction of the bird. The draft plan, which is open for public comment until Oct. 22, recommends spending more than \$27 million in federal dollars on recovery efforts for the woodpecker.

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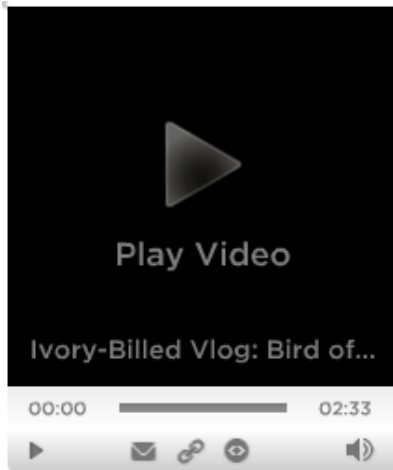
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"The opportunity to recover this icon of the ornithological world

cannot and should not be passed over," said Sam Hamilton, regional director for the service's Southeast Region and leader of the recovery team.

Much of the recovery work has been happening in Arkansas, but projects are also under way in Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina and Texas, Fleming said.



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Jorge Ribas heads south to join the hunt for the elusive ivory-bill.

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The plan outlines habitat needs and future conservation efforts aimed at protecting the woodpecker.

The plan was drafted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the University of Georgia, Florida Gulf Coast University, the [Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology](#), the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Arkansas Natural Heritage Foundation.

The woodpecker was thought to be extinct when Cornell University researchers reported spotting one in 2004 in an eastern Arkansas swamp. Researchers and birders have since converged on the Cache River Wildlife Management Area hoping to spot the bird and hear its distinct double-rapping.

Researchers have also reported spotting an ivory-billed woodpecker in a northwest Florida swamp.

The proposed recovery efforts include research on the bird's status and ecology, developing new surveying techniques, conducting forest inventories in the Cache and White River basins and developing population estimates, among other measures.

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