



**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**  
***Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Species***  
**FOR USE TO GUIDE SITE SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT OF PRIORITY SPECIES**

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) *Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Species* do not have regulatory authority. Therefore, the following are recommendations only. This abbreviated version of a chapter in *Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Species: Volume IV* (see [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phs/vol4/phs\\_vol4\\_birds.pdf](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phs/vol4/phs_vol4_birds.pdf)) has been streamlined for easier application. Where applicable, these recommendations should be put into practice consistently across a landscape to be most effective. The following recommendations are not site-specific. Where available, a professional in a relevant field (e.g., wildlife biologist) should evaluate the site and surrounding landscape when applying these recommendations.

Attach parcel map with species location indicated if available.

General Recommendations

- Pilings with known purple martin nests in standing water and snags (especially snags near water) should be protected and left standing.
- Retain snags near saltwater or wetlands during timber harvesting operations, and during salvage operations after burns, blow-downs, and insect infestations.
- Snags can be created in forest openings, or at forest edges (e.g., by topping trees) where nesting cavities are lacking, especially within 10 mi of existing purple martin colonies.
- Because northern flickers and pileated woodpeckers excavate cavities used by martins, managing for these species will indirectly benefit martins (see *Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Species: Pileated Woodpecker* for additional management guidelines).
- If natural sites are lacking and cannot be provided by manipulating habitat, artificial nesting structures can be provided. Specifications are provided for one such design on the following page. New colony establishment through the use of artificial nesting structures is only recommended if these structures will be maintained over time (see items # 5 and 6 on the next page).
- If pesticides are to be used in areas inhabited by martins, refer to [wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phs/vol4/appndxa.pdf](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phs/vol4/appndxa.pdf) for useful contacts to assess the use of pesticides, herbicides, and their alternatives.

I have read and understand the above recommendations (s) placed on Parcel # \_\_\_\_\_ located in the \_\_\_\_\_ Quarter of \_\_\_\_\_ Quarter of Section \_\_\_\_\_, Township \_\_\_\_\_, Range \_\_\_\_\_ (East/West meridian) with actual street address of \_\_\_\_\_.

January 2005

1) Construct nest boxes using a design such as that shown in Figure 1. Box dimensions should be at least 10" x 7" x 7". It is important to make the entrance exactly 1 1/4" high, continuous with the porch floor. Entrance holes higher than 1 1/4" will allow the box to be invaded by unwanted species such as the European starling and house sparrow. The top of the opening should be sanded smooth. The porch is a necessary feature, and the floorboard should be rough to provide traction. These features, particularly the size of the opening, will aid in dissuading house sparrows and starlings from taking over the nest boxes.

2) Protect boxes from wet weather by sealing edges with caulking material. Painting or varnishing the wood, using cedar for construction or protecting the roof with galvanized tin, can provide additional protection. Provide drainage holes in the box floor and ventilation holes near the top.

3) Locate boxes in existing colonies first. Locate additional boxes in suitable habitat within 10 mi of existing colonies. A minimum of 3 boxes should be erected at each site for this colonial nesting species (J. Bottorff, personal communication); however, populations in the west do not appear to use the "apartment" style houses that eastern populations are so well known for (B. Tweit, personal communication).

4) Locate boxes near (preferably above) water or wetlands with minimum clear air space of 15', preferably 100', for circling and foraging around the nest. Erect houses high enough above the ground or water to avoid vandalism and high tides. J. Bottorff, personal communication) noted no difference in use of boxes erected from 3' to 10' above the water.

5) It is not necessary to remove martin nests from previous years. If nesting material is removed, it should be done in the spring and the contents placed in a dry spot beneath the nest. This is to allow for the emergence of chalcid wasps, which help to control Protocalliphora, a parasite on martin nestlings. The wasp larvae live in nest materials and will return to the martin boxes if old nests are left nearby.

6) Where European starlings and house sparrows are a problem, plug the box entrances from October to mid-April. If starlings establish themselves in a box, remove their nests, eggs, and young on a routine basis (they will renest several times in a breeding season). The same measures can be taken with house sparrows early in the breeding season; however, removal of sparrow nests later in the cycle may cause sparrows to wander into martin nests and destroy their young. Adult sparrows may be controlled. If this is impossible, remove eggs and young, but leave sparrow nests in later months to prevent sparrows from taking over martin nests.

Starlings and house sparrows are not classified as a protected species. However, other cavity-nesters that may inhabit martin boxes, such as swallows, are protected, and occupied swallow nests should not be removed.

Figure 1  
(Courtesy of Tom Lund, USFWS, 1985)

