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**Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Partners in Flight Working Group Report**

Meeting of September 10, 2008

Kirk Nelson, Chair

Saratoga Springs, New York

The meeting was convened during 9:00am – 12:30 pm, chaired by Dave Erickson on behalf of Kirk Nelson. 28 participants were in attendance

**Scheduled Discussion Items**

**Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act: Early Reauthorization** – The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is leading an effort to reauthorize the Neotrop Act. The reauthorization would ramp up the authorization to 20 Million by 2015. They have 16 cosponsors of House bill that was introduced early this week. They anticipate the Senate bill will be introduced soon. They are calling it the Act for Songbirds and have legislative tools on ABC's website. The legislative tools are available to the Bird Conservation Alliance members (200 plus) for use on their own websites. Over 30,000 citizens have taken action to contact their members in support of the Neotrop Act. There is a small possibility to have the Neotrop Act folded into an omnibus bill at the end of the year. It is more likely it will be reintroduced next year and build on the momentum it got this year. The House Natural Resources Subcommittee had a hearing on the decline of migratory birds. This and other efforts will help us get the bill considered in the future.

**Bird Education Alliance for Conservation** - Ashley Dayer presented on the Bird Education Alliance for Conservation (BEAC). BEAC was formed as a coalition of educators, biologists, managers, and others who value bird conservation education. BEAC engages new audiences in conservation action, develops the tools necessary to improve bird conservation messages and education materials, and promotes incorporation of education as a tool into the bird conservation initiatives. BEAC's activities are undertaken by a working group with participants from diverse organizations and agencies. Their efforts are focused on six goals:

1. Growing a collaborative network committed to bird conservation education
2. Collaborating with the science community
3. Identifying gaps in bird conservation education resources

4. Enhancing availability of conservation education materials and tools
5. Developing means to reach underserved audiences
6. Ensuring links internationally

Ashley Dayer presented detailed information on a specific project that is of interest to the Working Group. BEAC assisted Partners in Flight (PIF) in polling users of the North American Landbird Conservation Plan. They intend to use the result to improve development, implementation and dissemination of the update to the Plan that is currently being undertaken. Key results of the survey found that the majority of users of the current plan were satisfied with it and used it for the primarily because of the conservation information it contains especially the information found in Table 1. For more information on BEAC, visit their new website (<http://www.birdedalliance.org>).

**Climate Change Implications for Migratory Shorebirds** - Hector Galbraith, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences presented information on the affects of climate change on shorebirds. Shorebirds are extremely vulnerable to climate change. They breed at high latitudes where climate change effects are expected to be most severe. They have long, energy demanding migrations that depend on ecological synchronicities along the migration route. They also depend on wind patterns for migration and are vulnerable to sea level rise at coastal stopover sites. What makes this even more of a concern is that we are already seeing major population reductions in many species and the causes are as yet unknown. Species such as the American Golden Plover are declining by 7.2% a year. Sea level rise will not affect all habitats equally. For example, sea level rise will be higher in southern San Francisco Bay than Northern San Francisco Bay. Since the Bay is critical to shorebirds for stop over sites the loss of mudflats will have impacts on shorebird populations. Shorebird migration has evolved over time to coincide with the availability of food resources and breeding habitat. Climate change will most likely alter the availability of food and habitat during some times of year and therefore will affect shorebird migration. In order to address these concerns, we need to increase research on current causes of decline; monitor productivity, timing of migration, and ecological correlates; and identify what the management options are for addressing climate change impacts.

**Intermountain West JV: Giving Wheels to the Waterbird and Shorebird Regional Step-Down Plans in Habitat Conservation Delivery** - Dave Smith Coordinator of the Intermountain West JV (IMJV) informed the Working Group about the process they use to implement waterbird and shorebird conservation objectives on the ground in the IMJV. The IMJV is using the information in the regional waterbird and shorebird plans for implementation. They are picking up where the regional plans stop by developing population and habitat objectives where necessary. By developing population objectives they are able to develop models for conservation delivery. They are linking on the ground conservation delivery to implementation through the farm bill conservation programs, State Wildlife Action Plan implementation, North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) and land trusts. The Farm Bill has \$24 Billion of conservation opportunity through EQIP, Technical Assistance Contribution Agreements, and the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative. The IMJV has hired a farm bill coordinator to

enhance relationships with the NRCS and FSA. They are providing money for capacity grants and working on a Conservation Effects Assessment Program (CEAP) project. Since 1991 the IMJV has received over \$41 million in NAWCA grants and will continue to apply for NAWCA grants. The IMJV realizes that the amount of money available through the State Wildlife Grants program is not enough to implement the State Wildlife Action Plans. To help implement the goals of their, the IMJV has committed staff and funds to work with the states.

**Mineral Management Service and Bird Conservation** - Jim Woehr provided information on the work of the Mineral Management Service (MMS). The MMS is in the Department of the Interior. Their mission is to manage activities in U.S. waters on the outer continental shelf. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 added alternative energy activities on the continental shelf to MMS's portfolio. It used to be the responsibility of the Corps of Engineers. When this happened they became involved in the Cape Wind Project in Massachusetts. It became clear that there are potential avian impacts so they hired Jim Woehr as their first avian biologist. The MMS wants to make the best decision they can on the siting of alternative energy off shore. To do this, they need information from the bird conservation community. Currently, they are developing policy on research and policy assessment (ocean wave and current energy and wind) in the outer shelf. With these leases industry might place MET tower at sea to determine the quality of the wind resources. They also had a proposed rule whose comment period has ended, on how to lease blocks of the shelf for commercial development. It will be a while before commercial development will happen offshore. There is limited information on what and how birds use the offshore areas. MMS would like to consider bird conservation concerns early on in the development process.

**Partners in Flight Update** - PIF is updating the North American Landbird Conservation Plan (Plan). The new Plan will be tri-national and include 893 species. They hope the update brings attention to bird conservation issues and needs in Mexico. Using the survey conducted by BEAC, they will have more targeted messages and take into account the social and educational aspects in the updated Plan. The McAllen Conference Needs Assessment was completed and distributed in mid-August. It is an 89-page document that spells out the 465 needs identified in the McAllen Conference sessions. The McAllen Conference proceedings are being peer reviewed. Education needs are high on PIF's priority list. For example, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and Point Reyes Bird Observatory developed a pocket guide to birds in specific habitat. They distributed over 50,000 of the pocket guides to landowners. PIF would like to partner with them to develop a guide to birds for the sage brush habitat. They also are considering other habitats such as pinyon juniper. PIF is poised to sign an agreement with the Mesoamerican Society for Conservation and Biology. They are also exploring how to conduct a climate change vulnerability assessment of the 893 landbirds of North America. For more information on these items contact Terry Rich ([terry\\_rich@fws.gov](mailto:terry_rich@fws.gov)).

**US Shorebird Plan Update** - The Shorebird website has been revised in an attempt to make it more useful to the community. The Waterbird Society is meeting in Texas in

early November. The Shorebird Council will meet prior to the Waterbird Society meeting. They are holding a shorebird group meeting in Mazatlan in March 2009 to bring together the shorebird community from around the world. They will conduct specific training sessions as well as have presentations. They are beginning to discuss how to report accomplishments of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. It is difficult to identify what money is spent on shorebird conservation since it is not a line item in many partner's budgets. They are also developing a guide to shorebird monitoring. They hope to have it completed by the end of the year.

**Waterbird Conservation for the Americas Update** - The Waterbird Conservation for the Americas produced an achievements document that highlights work done by the initiative and its partners since 2002. A copy of the brochure can be found on the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas website at [www.waterbirdconservation.com](http://www.waterbirdconservation.com). The initiative is holding two workshops at the Waterbird Society meeting. They will discuss implementing the regional waterbird conservation plans and how to better link those plans to Joint Venture implementation.. They continue to work on marshbird monitoring also. Secretive marshbirds is a difficult group to monitor. The USFWS with other partners is conducting a pilot study to examine the feasibility of a secretive marshbird survey program. During the first year, 2008, surveys are being conducted in the State of Wisconsin. In 2009, they will also begin in New York and other States. Mark Seamans, USFWS, is leading this effort ([mark\\_seamans@fws.gov](mailto:mark_seamans@fws.gov)).

**Southern Wings Program Recommendation** - The Partners in Flight/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group (Working Group) recommends that the Bird Conservation Committee approve and endorse the final recommendation of the Southern Wings Task Force with the following clarifications.

1. The Working Group recommends that the members of the Southern Wings Task Force (with some potential changes in membership if Task Force members are not able to continue participating) provide leadership to the development and implementation of the Southern Wings program under the guises of the Bird Conservation Committee. In the near term, we recommend that they flesh out the final details of the programs and communicate with the regional associations. Their responsibility will also include creating a technical team annually to review and recommend proposals to the Regional Associations for approval.
2. The Working Group recommends that the program be announced in March 2009. At that time, we recommend the Bird Conservation Committee seek endorsement from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.
3. The Working Group recommends that states that are willing and able to begin contributing funds be allowed to do so.

**National Conservation Need recommendation for 2009** - The Working Group agreed to discuss the 2010 National Conservation Need (NCN) via email and phone. We will work with the other Working Groups to provide a recommendation to the Bird Conservation Committee in the next 2 months.

**Action Items:**

1. The Partners in Flight/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group (Working Group) recommends that the Bird Conservation Committee approve and endorse the final recommendation of the Southern Wings Task Force

Submitted by: Dave Erickson on behalf of Kirk Nelson