

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Bird Conservation Committee Part II Report

Meeting of March 26, 2010

Gordon Myers, Chair

Richard Hatcher, Vice-Chair

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The meeting convened from 8:00 – 10:00 am, chaired by Gordon Myers. 30 participants were in attendance, including 10 Committee members

Scheduled Discussion Items

Waterfowl Working Group

NAWMP Coordinator and Wildlife Liaison.- Dean Smith is filling the NAWMP Coordinator position at the AFWA. He begins on April 1, 2010. His priority is enhancing and improving communications between Canadian and US partners through the AFWA structure. He would also like to assess how he can increase cross border JV discussions and LCC development. Some of his work will focus on NAWMP and NAWCA. However, additional responsibilities will include work on other wildlife policy issues.

Clean Water Restoration Act – Since the last meeting, the Senate had a markup that passed an amendment that became a substitute for the Bill. It reiterated the purpose of the Bill to restore the level of Clean Water Act protections to what existed before the SWANCC decision. It passed out of the Senate Committee in fall 2009 but has not moved since that time. The House has not introduced a Bill yet. If companion legislation moves in the near future the Working Group will report to the Bird Conservation Committee.

State Grants to NAWMP/NAWCA projects in Canada –The program started in the early 80s. The AFWA recommendations from 2005 set a goal of \$10 Million annually. In FY 2009, 33 states contributed a little over \$2.8M. This current year will be a challenge for states to contribute. The \$2.8 Million effort resulted in \$14.99 Million on the ground. The money is distributed throughout Canada; however, typically over 50% goes to Saskatchewan because that is where the majority of the ducks are. In the Prairie Habitat JV they secured or enhanced over 202,000 acres in 2009. The Eastern Habitat JV secured or enhanced over 23,000 acres in 2009.

NAWMP Committee and National Reports - The Plan Committee met in Calgary about a month ago. The agenda included Joint Venture presentations on the progress they have made for waterfowl conservation and how they have responded to the recommendations in the assessment (Prairie Habitat and Prairie Pothole JVs). The JVs have responded positively to the assessment and have risen to the challenges. They also discussed the 2011-2012 proposed update to the Plan. The next meeting will be in Phoenix in February 2010.

2011-2012 NAWMP Revision -The Future of Waterfowl Management Workshop was held in Minneapolis about 1.5 years ago to set the direction for the revision. Since that time there has been policy and technical work to move toward the 2011/2012 Plan revision. Six workshops have been

held- 2 in Canada and 6 in the United States. Three fundamental objectives emerged from the workshops. They are to (1) maintain healthy waterfowl populations as a part of North American fauna; (2) maintain landscapes capable of sustaining waterfowl populations in perpetuity; and, (3) perpetuate the tradition of waterfowling, in its broadest sense. There will be a second round of consultation workshop starting in September. Comments can be provided on the NAWMP revision website. (www.NAWMPrevision.org).

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives – Paul Schmidt shared the positions of Joint Ventures in LCCs. The LCCs seem to be in a similar place as the JVs were in the 80s in that no one knew what a JV was and no one had money to start one. Gary Myers and Harold Benson conducted a meeting to develop what a JV might look like and with this leadership the concept of a JV was developed.

Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Working Group

Mourning Dove Task Force – John Schulz (MO) reported the Mourning Dove Task Force met October 28-29, 2009 at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD. The group focused primarily on developing an explicit harvest strategy to replace the interim strategy implemented in 2009. Since 2003, more than 200,000 doves have been banded with approximately 11,000 bands reported to the Bird Banding Laboratory. A mourning dove banding needs assessment was completed in 2009. Banding goals are helpful when USFWS seeks assistance from National Wildlife Refuges around the country where such assistance could play a significant role in helping meet state banding goals.

Mourning Dove Attitude Survey on Nontoxic Shot Regulations - Phil Seng (D.J. Case & Associates) provided an update on this topic. At the 2009 North American Conference in Arlington, VA, the 4 Flyway Councils approved of the concept of a national dove hunter survey to assess the awareness and attitudes of dove hunters regarding lead poisoning and potential actions that might be taken in relation to it. However, misunderstandings about the survey development process surfaced. To address these misunderstandings, AFWA was asked to pass through money to D.J. Case & Associates to collect input on the survey from the management community and to assist with development of the survey instrument. Since October 2009, D.J. Case & Associates has solicited input on the survey objectives, models, and variables from the Mourning Dove Task Force, as well as from technical committees representing the 3 dove management units.

Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Support Task Force – Ralph Morgenweck (FWS) provided an update. In March 2006 meeting, MSUGB Support Task Force (Task Force) was established. The Task Force was directed to 1. update the research and management needs of the 16 species of migratory shore and upland game birds (MSUGB); 2. prepare recommendations for priority funding needs; 3. develop a strategy for funding priority research and management needs; 4. stay current on emerging MSUGB issues and maintain active liaison with the USFWS, NGOs, Flyway Councils, States, and other governmental entities; and 5. support and assist the AFWA-MSUGB Working Group in matters relating to these species.

National Marshbird Monitoring Program & the National Wetlands Inventory – Tom Cooper (FWS) presented a report on this topic on behalf of Mark Seamans (FWS). The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and partners initiated a pilot study of secretive marshbirds (i.e., rails, bitterns, limpkin, coot, gallinules, and pied-billed grebe) in 2008 to assess a potential monitoring program. Program objectives are to estimate (a) status and trends of each species, (b) habitat associations, and (c) the effect of conservation actions on marshbirds. In 2008, the entire state of Wisconsin was surveyed. In 2009, Idaho, Kentucky, the District of Columbia, and eastern New York were sampled in

addition to Wisconsin. Florida and Michigan should be added in 2010, with additional states planned for 2011 and 2012. The pilot phase will continue through 2012, after which additional states will be added annually to obtain full coverage in the U.S.

A recommendation was passed by the MSUBG Working Group related to the importance of updating the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) due to the need for better wetlands data for marshbird surveys. Rails, coots and gallinules are habitat specialists, requiring marshes for all or part of their life history cycle. Thus, the availability of accurate, geospatial wetland data is critical for successful conservation of these species and their habitats. The NWI developed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is one of the best sources of spatially explicit wetland information. Although other wetland databases are available, none provide the spatial resolution or detailed classification system of the NWI. Unfortunately, much of the NWI coverage is now greater than 20 years old and is in need of updating. **The Migratory Shore & Upland Game Bird Working Group recommends that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies promote increased capacity for updating the National Wetlands Inventory (see final action below).**

Woodcock Task Force – Tom Cooper (FWS) provided an update. The Woodcock Task Force met this week at the North American. Topics covered included an update on Regional Woodcock Initiatives, the final report for a Woodcock Communications Strategy, outcomes from the American Woodcock Priority Information Needs Workshop, efforts to select Priority Management Areas in the Upper Great Lakes as part of the Woodcock and Young Forest Initiative, and formation of a Monitoring Technical Advisory Committee.

Partners in Flight Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group

Increasing the Effectiveness of the Working Group to engage with State Wildlife Agencies - The Working Group focused on discussing how it can function more effectively to help the states address bird conservation needs and update their State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) when state bird biologists are not able to attend the March and September Working Group meetings. Andy Paulios, Wisconsin DNR and Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI) coordinator presented WI SWAP and WBCI information. Andy provided information on how the initiatives can help the states agencies update and implement the SWAPs. In order to better communicate with the state wildlife agencies the WG would like to develop webinars and use other new communication tools to increase the communication between the wildlife agencies and the bird conservation initiatives and the JVs and increase the effectiveness of the WG. **The Working Group asks for the support of the Bird Conservation Committee to survey the state bird biologists to determine what they need from the PIF, shorebird and waterbird conservation initiatives. This will be followed up with a series of webinars for state bird biologists and SWAP Coordinators to step down the products and information available to help state agencies update their SWAPs such as monitoring tools, PIF tri-national assessment and Southern Wings program, international information for SWAPS, and State of the Birds/climate change risk assessment.**

The Bird Conservation Committee supported this idea and asked that the Committee consider how this could be a pilot project for considering ways the Committee as a whole could better communicate internally and with state agencies.

Southern Wings Program: **The Working Group asks that the Bird Conservation Committee encourage Directors to consider participation in the Southern Wings program at the AFWA Business meeting, through a letter or by some other means.** Gordon will pass out a handout on the Southern Wings program at the AFWA Business meeting and mention the need for states to consider how to participate in this important program.

Partners in Flight Anniversary and Tri-national Assessment: Partner in Flight (PIF) is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. They sponsored a reception Tuesday night. It featured an amazing video highlighting partnerships and celebrating the 20th anniversary. They presented awards to 6 people that were integral in the development and success of PIF. They were Charles Baxter, Gary Myers, Peter Stangel, Naomi Edelson, Paul Schmidt, and George Fenwick. They are also releasing a tri-national assessment on May 27, 2010 in Washington, DC.

Resident Game Bird Working Group

Cal DuBrock, chaired his first Resident Game Bird Working Group meeting and thanked past chairs for their leadership. He also acknowledged the support of Laurel Barnhill and Deb Hahn. Larry Kruckenberg has agreed to be the Vice-Chair of the Working Group.

Western Quail Management Plan – The WAFWA Bird Conservation Committee endorsed the plan. The Resident Game Bird Working Group endorsed the plan. The Working Group asked that the Bird Conservation Committee endorse the plan. The Bird Conservation Committee will distribute a link to the plan to the whole Committee for endorsement at the September 2010 meeting.

www.westernquail.org

Northern Bobwhite Quail Initiative - The first plan was published 8 years ago and since that time NBCI continues to be a state centered initiative of, by, and for states within the bobwhite range. The management board had its first official meeting earlier today. The overall structure of the initiative is as follows. A NBCI Management Board chaired by Jon Gassett (KY) with Nick Wiley (FL) as co-chair; a National Bobwhite Technical Committee comprised of state, federal and other biologists; and a NBCI Operation Center located at the University of Tennessee where the science coordinator and other positions will be housed. The Technical Committee meeting is August 3-6 in Wichita, KS. This will be the first meeting of this group outside of the SE. For more information see the website. <http://www.bobwhitetechnical.org/>

National Wild Turkey Management Plan – The plan is internet based. The NWTTF website has some excellent tools under the link to the Management Plan (<http://www.nwtf.org/NAWTMP/>) including GIS data layers. The website will act as a clearing house with state and BCR pages that can be selected from a map view. In addition pages are available for an executive summary, resources, and accomplishments.

National Pheasants Plan – They are in the process of developing a draft plan. The next meeting of the study group will be in October 2010 in Indiana where they will continue to work with a goal to have a draft by the end of 2010.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Upland Game Bird Plans - Texas developed two game bird advisory groups (upland and migratory) and these groups took on the responsibility of developing game bird strategic plans. The upland plan was approved earlier this year, and it does have habitat goals. Based on the positive response of the game bird strategic plans the Department is crafting a division strategic plan that will dovetail with the game bird plans. These will be published and copies are expected to be available in 90 days.

Legislative Updates – Gary Taylor provided legislative updates. The Senate endorsed the NAWCA fix and it should be signed by the President soon. The Joint Venture Authorization bill passed the House unanimously and was heard in the Senate Committee and was reported out. It has been hotlined in the Senate but there is a hold on that Bill so there is still more work for the conservation community. The Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA) was reported out of the Senate Committee last year and intended to restore the jurisdictional reach of the CWRA before the SWANNC decision in 2001. There is still a great deal of objection to the Bill. They do not have the 60 votes in the Senate. In the House, Chairman Oberstar who previously introduced bills, is now working in the Administration and House Democratic leadership to try and get a path for passage by the House not just out of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee. The political challenge is that it is an election year and they have dealt with two controversial issues (climate change and health care). It is not clear if they are willing to take this bill to the floor. The Duck Stamp Legislation (H.R. 1916) was introduced to the House and they had a hearing on the legislation. Some members of the Committee objected to the land acquisition component of the Bill. As a result, the Bill contains a number of amendments that make the Bill unworkable. The desire now is to get a clean Bill reintroduced in the near future. The authorization Bill for the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross is working its way through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Future Vision and Direction of the Bird Conservation Committee and its Working Groups – The Committee considered how to increase communications throughout the year and how to better involve the states agencies and other AFWA members in the work of this Committee? The Committee would like to focus more on policy and budget issues and increase its cooperation with the Legislative Committee. The Committee will reduce the amount of reporting at the September meeting and focus on budget and legislative/policy issues. This will dovetail with AFWA's federal budget recommendation process and allow the Chair and Vice-chair to provide input on behalf of the Committee. In order to determine what issues the Committee should address, the Committee would like to take a strategic approach by using tools such as the State of the Birds report to focus and guide agendas and NCN development. The also would like to use a tool like Base Camp (or AFWA's website) to improve interaction and communications.

National Conservation Need – The NCN was not accepted. The Committee would like to solicit feedback from the Grants Committee on their NCN.

Additional items:

Capacity building for Farm Bill Conservation Program Delivery – Jen Mock and Deb Hahn presented in Part I of the Bird Conservation Committee on the importance of increasing biological capacity on the ground to implement Farm Bill conservation programs. The Committee passed a recommendation that will go to the Agriculture Conservation Committee for consideration and then be presented at the AFWA Business meeting. The Bird Conservation Committee and the Agriculture Conservation Committee recommend that the Association send a letter to Chief Dave White of NRCS thanking him for supporting partner biologists on the ground and asking him to continue and increase his support to put more partner biologists on the ground to meet NRCS conservation program implementation goals and fish and wildlife conservation goals. The letter should also thank the Chief for supporting the change in the required match in cooperative agreements from 50-50 to 75-25.

Appreciation of Vernon Bevill's contributions to the Bird Conservation Committee – The Committee thanked Vernon Bevill for his service to the Committee and wished him well in his retirement.

Action Items:

The Bird Conservation Committee will discuss pending legislative/policy issues that are of importance to birds at the September 2010 meeting. This will help the Chair and Vice-chair provide input to the budget process in February of each year.

The Bird Conservation Committee recommends that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) promote the importance of the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). The Bird Conservation Committee asks the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to draft a letter to the Director of the USFWS highlighting the importance of the NWI to birds and its relationship to the data needs of the Joint Ventures, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and other partnerships.

The Bird Conservation Committee recommend that the Association send a letter to Chief Dave White of NRCS thanking him for supporting partner biologists on the ground and asking him to continue and increase his support to put more partner biologists on the ground to meet NRCS conservation program implementation goals and fish and wildlife conservation goals. The letter should also thank the Chief for supporting the change in the required match in cooperative agreements from 50-50 to 75-25. The recommendation will be shared with the Agriculture Conservation Committee to gain their support.

The Bird Conservation Committee will distribute the link to the Western Quail Plan (www.westernquail.org) to the whole Committee and ask that they review it for consideration of endorsement at the September 2010 meeting.

The Bird Conservation Committee will request input and feedback from the multi-state grant Committee on the NCN.

Submitted by: Gordon Myers and Richard Hatcher