



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE PART II

Chair: Gordon Myers, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

Vice-Chair: Tony Wilkinson, NY State Department of Environmental Conservation

13 March 2020

8:30-10:30 am

North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference

Omaha, NE

Bird- and Fish-Related Conflicts Working Group Report

David Cobb, Research Director, NC Wildlife Resources Commission (Report given by Shaun Oldenburger)

- Ken Richkus (USFWS Migratory Birds) provided an updated on the [Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) for management of double-crested cormorants, and next steps. The proposed rule considers options including: state permitting, allowing more freedom for aquaculture facilities, or a combination of the two. The comment period closed mid-March and the B&FRC WG submitted a comment letter, as have many states. Based on USFWS communication, the Service will evaluate public input during the ANPR process to inform the development of a new EIS and rule package which will be published and available for public comment as early as late- spring/early-summer. They anticipate a 45-day comment period.
- B&FRC WG is in the process of trying to schedule a WG meeting for early summer to focus on completion of identified action items and development of a next round of actions needed. Group will also work through potential comments on an eventual rule package and EIS, depending on timing of publishing in the Federal Register.
- B&FRC WG provided editorial input into a National Flyway Council letter to state agency directors, reminding them of the WG and to encourage intra-agency communication among Flyway reps and fisheries staffs.

PIF/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group Report

Sara Schweitzer, Wildlife Diversity Coordinator, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

At the WG meeting, Landbird (PIF), shorebird (USSCP), and Waterbird **conservation initiatives** provided updates on activities.

- Geoff Geupel (Point Blue) gave a summary of actions undertaken by **PIF** since our last meeting, [presented in a 1-page document](#) provided by Bob Ford (USFWS), the PIF Coordinator. Geoff focused primarily on “**New Game-Changer Opportunities**” that will be pursued during the 2020-2021 year, the **30th Anniversary of PIF**. These topics include: strong and growing collaborations; new science and technology that will provide improved data for species’ full annual cycle models; integration of PIF business plans using the open standards for the practice of conservation; legislation such as the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, U.S. Farm Bill, and USFWS’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program; and, communication and engagement to get more people outdoors and birding, using common language from the NABCI Communications Committee, and especially rallying around the Bring Back 3 Billion Birds (BB3BB) campaign.
- Sara Schweitzer of the **USSCP Council** provided a [1-page summary](#) of recent accomplishments, drafted by Brad Andres (USFWS), the Shorebird Coordinator. In 2020, the USSCP will draft a synopsis of progress achieved since the 2001 Plan was completed, as well as future directions. A paper on shorebird population sizes and trends

will be published in 2020, and Brad Andres is accepting survey estimates and other information from state biologists and others. Atlantic and Pacific Flyway Shorebird Initiatives are continuing to complete collaborative projects, and each has a web site where much information can be found. A Mid-Continent Shorebird Conservation Initiative is well underway, and additional progress will be made during workshops in 2020.

- The **Waterbirds Conservation for the Americas initiative** has not had a coordinator since 2015. Working from a sub-committee of NABCI, Dave Gordon (USFWS) and Sara Schweitzer (NCWRC) identified several former members of the Waterbird Council who are willing to become active again. They will work on the Council's Terms of Agreement and revisit the Plan to begin to update it. A significant task for the Waterbird Council will be to get the Waterbird Coordinator position filled. There is great need for a coordinator for work with waterbirds because there are separate groups (e.g., Pacific Seabird Group, Atlantic Marine Bird Cooperative, Bird-Fish Human Conflict WG of AFWA, etc.) pursuing conservation, management, research, and policies associated with waterbirds, but this work is not coordinated. Further, there are large data gaps for seabirds, a group that is declining rapidly, as noted in Rosenberg et al.'s 2019 paper in *Science*, and a group for which there are scant data for the Avian Conservation Assessment Database (ACAD).

To address **threats** to landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds, the WG concluded that a **common threats analysis** should be conducted to identify significant issues common to all birds. The Avian Conservation Assessment Database and open standards for the practice of conservation will be used to begin this process that will be led by John Alexander (Klamath Bird Observatory).

Second, due to loss of grassland habitat and avian species, this WG strongly supports the development of a **national grassland policy** coordinated by the National Wildlife Federation, NABCI, and World Wildlife Fund.

Regarding the WG's recent focus on **Avian Conservation Database Management**, Phase 1 of a project with the Avian Knowledge Network has been completed (Pacific and Mississippi flyways' CWB data), and a project through the University of Maine (Atlantic Flyway CWB data) has also been completed. Phase 2 will bulk upload existing CWB datasets (Pacific, Mississippi, and Atlantic flyways) and ensure uploading capabilities and capacity for large datasets from future, coordinated surveys. The Atlantic Flyway Council approved \$15,000 for Phase 2, which will ensure proper uploading capability for the 2023 CWB survey to be conducted within the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central flyways and Great Lakes. This will be an unprecedented, coordinated survey of CWBs and management of survey data.

Feral and Free-Ranging Cat Work Group Report

Sara Schweitzer, Wildlife Diversity Coordinator, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

Grant Sizemore (American Bird Conservancy) provided an update on legal and policy issues associated with feral and free-ranging cats. Several states such as Illinois, Michigan, Vermont, and Virginia have had bills introduced that would legalize Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) as a method to address feral and free-ranging cats. On the other hand, in New Mexico and California, lawsuits have been filed against cities that have feral and free-ranging cats, placing blame on the city for cats biting people (adults and children).

Grants asks that, in each state, we and our legal and policy staff be alert for legislation being introduced that would condone TNR or other actions that would worsen the problem of feral and free-ranging cat numbers. It would be most beneficial if this legislation did not move forward.

Ashley Gramza (Arkansas Game & Fish) provided a review and summary of the survey of agency staff the WG had completed in 2017. The results of the survey will be put in a report and will provide information for the WG's Tool Kit.

Since September 2019, WG members have drafted sections of a Tool Kit for agencies to provide background, suggestions for actions, and literature regarding feral and free-ranging cats that may cause harm to native wildlife species and habitats. During our meeting, we reviewed draft content in each section of the Tool Kit, provided suggestions, and added content and new ideas. The draft sections include: Executive Summary, Introduction, Education and Outreach, Management, Partnerships, Disease Concerns, Human Dimensions, Model Regulatory and Legal Language, Legal Issues, and Conclusions. Literature cited in each section is provided at the end of each section. The WG will add a section that will focus on impacts to game species and sport fish from cats, directly and indirectly.

The WG will continue its work on this Tool Kit and have a final draft ready for review in early to mid-July 2020, with the goal of having a final product at the September 2020 meeting.

Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Working Group Report

Alicia Hardin, Wildlife Division Administrator, NE Game and Parks Commission

- The woodcock task force update included a briefing on some research, and information on the RCPP Young Forest Initiative, a regional initiative initially covering 17 states (from Maine to Virginia and Minnesota). More discussions were had about the progress and challenges of the Young Forest Initiative overall. Are there enough tools in the farm bill to help them?
- The Woodcock harvest strategies group gave a synopsis of the threshold change and shift in dates to earlier times. The threshold change is not able to be assessed and the earlier dates (if nothing else changes) would not have an impact on population numbers. More to come from the flyways.
- There was an update to the Dove Task Force, including updates to the priority research and the beginning stages of an IPM, the first year of the reward band information was given also.
- A review of the R3 and game bird resolution was given and an update of the HIP study.
- The USFWS updated the work group on 4 research projects that they funded with the two fiscal years worth of funding (\$100,000): Woodcocks, Doves, Clapper Rail, and gallinules. The next call for RFPs will be in March 2021.
- An update on NABCI was given including a call out to work on a plan to show the importance of BBL and BBS use across the country in an effort to highlight the importance of this data to the many facets of bird management.
- Shaun Oldenburger also gave an update on the status of secretive marsh bird surveys across the country.

Harvest Information Program Working Group Report

Josh Avey, Terrestrial Wildlife Branch Chief, AZ Department of Natural Resources

Report given by Brad Bortner

- 1) Brad Bortner has been hired as the point person on the implementation of pilot program through WMI- he'll be working with states volunteering to eliminate 3rd party data entry in state licensing. Previously studies have shown that some vendors have do not ask hunters the stratification questions needed for HIP. A few years ago, Kentucky eliminated 3rd party vendor data entry by having hunters obtain their HIP at a license vendor but enter data themselves online or by phone. Compliance was high after strong communications effort, and this serves as a good model for the WMI pilot. WMI is working with four states (NC, LA, AZ, MT)) to implement a pilot program, and they are also talking to CT and MN re: commitment to pilot. KS and NV may also join pilot. Stratification questions are used to sample hunters but also would help state agencies help understand how engaged hunters are, so Brad is working with R3 community. May help states refine their programs to identify mig bird hunters and target R3 efforts. Contact Brad (bbortner@wildlifemgt.org) if states want to join.
- 2) The group had a presentation by Kathy Fleming, Branch Chief of Surveys and Data Management, USFWS Division of Migratory Bird Management. Kathy discussed a comprehensive evaluation of issues associated with the Harvest Survey including a review of the HIP stratification questions, while also addressing issues in the current operational survey. DMBM is testing a new online survey instead of

mailed questionnaire surveys. This online survey combined with other improvements may help with delays in sampling hunters, where they may forget the information that's being asked.

A few years ago, Kentucky eliminated 3rd party vendor data entry by having hunters obtain their HIP at a license vendor but enter data themselves online or by phone. Compliance was high after strong communications effort, and this serves as a good model for the WMI pilot.

Resident Game Bird Working Group Report

Todd Bishop, Chief, Wildlife Bureau, IA Department of Natural Resources

- In 2019, AFWA passed a resolution addressing the long-term decline in hunter participation (see [Resolution 2019-05-10 on page 7](#)). A small group within the RGB WG has identified 7 key questions/issues to build on, and may bring BCC some actions in the fall.
- Presentation from NORC re: new National Survey of Hunting and Fishing, which will be released in 2022. Consider an opportunity to coordinate between states on questions that will benefit state analyses.
- Shaun Oldenburger from TX is the new Vice-Chair of this WG.
- RGB WG is developing a document that provides voluntary guidance, best practices, and things to consider for states considering translocation of game birds. John Morgan (KY) is leading this effort, and the WG aims for final approval in the fall. Three resident game bird groups worked together to generate a template of what interstate translocation guidelines might look like for their focal species; these documents were approved through each group's management group/directors. AFWA's BCC RGB WG is working to develop national template, which will establish definitions of success, document BMPs, and aim to improve efficacy of translocation. The document will also set voluntary guidelines for states, set basic standards for consideration. Group expects to bring this document to both the Bird Committee and to the Fish and Wildlife Health Committee this fall for final review.

Waterfowl Working Group Report

Jeff Ver Steeg, Assistant Director, CO Parks and Wildlife

- 1) The WWG developed a letter, to be sent from AFWA's President to the Fish and Wildlife Service, commenting on the Service's proposal to make the theme "Celebrating our Waterfowl Hunting Heritage" permanent and requiring that a hunting element be included in the federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation stamp artwork every year. The comment period closed Monday, March 16. The letter includes 11 specific recommendations as an attachment. Those recommendations are nearly identical to recommendations submitted by AFWA in 2015.

The letter acknowledges AFWA's strong advocacy for the hunting and shooting heritage and commends the FWS for its efforts to address Executive Order 13443 (Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation) and Secretarial Order 3356 (Hunting, Fishing, Recreational Shooting, and wildlife Conservation Opportunities and Coordination with States, Tribes, and Territories). It references AFWA's Fish and Wildlife Relevancy Roadmap, which identifies a need to "increase engagement with, and service to, broader constituencies." The letter points out the vital role the Duck Stamp has played in protection wetland and associated uplands since 1934. Finally and most importantly, the letter offers to work with the FWS in improve the Duck Stamp program, and especially to broaden the appeal of the stamp artwork for anyone that has an interest in conserving nature.

- 2) Jen Mock Schaeffer will share a PR-DJ flow chart with David Brakhage and determine if AFWA can post WOTUS summary documents from the Association of Clean Water Administrators and the Association of State Wetland Managers on its website.
- 3) A subgroup of the WWG will work on terms of reference for a Fall Flights Task Force and states were asked to convey any interest in a review of state targets/goals and methodology for setting those goals. Dean will add information (including a video) on Fall Flights to AFWA's website.

Jeff proposes to send the letter regarding the Duck Stamp artwork to Aurelia Skipwith, the Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. David Hanni seconds.

Discussion:

- Most of the duck stamps currently purchased are purchased by duck hunters.
- Some state ornithological societies encourage their members to buy the stamp, and some refuges encourage people to buy the stamp in lieu of paying access fees.
- The Flyways make it clear in their letters on this topic that they oppose the proposal. The WWG's (and thus AFWA's) letter is toned down so as to not "pile on" to the negative comments.
- If AFWA submits the letter to the Director of the USFWS, rather than through the official comment record, the Service will not be able to consider these comments as part of their official evaluation.
- Some members of the WWG indicate that they would like to keep the letter out of the administrative record, and use it as an olive branch towards USFWS director.

The motion carries.

National Flyway Council Report

Todd Bishop, Chief, Wildlife Bureau, IA Department of Natural Resources

At the National Flyway Council meeting, the group discussed a letter commenting on the proposed change for hunting stamp artwork, saw a presentation on Fall Flights, and discussed the Harvest Information Program Work Group activities. The Flyways went through their Golden Eagle allocation procedure. The Flyways submitted a response to the woodcock harvest strategy, asking to adjust the framework earlier. The National Flyway Council also submitted a letter to state directors encouraging them to support improved communications between bird and fish staff.

The Flyways have expressed concerns about staffing levels in the Migratory Bird program within USFWS. The Flyways have sent letters about these concerns, but this has not been an effective strategy. They are looking for a path forward to engage more effectively on this issue.

Discussion

- States are asked to make Flyways aware of concerns in their state caused by lack of staffing in the USFWS Mig Bird program, so that Flyways have a list of specific examples that reflect these concerns.
- One state notes the importance of a bird banding lab, and also an annual fly-in; at the fly-in, states give synopses of successful projects and can tie in the importance of banding.
- States ask the Pacific Flyway to share their analysis
- One suggestion that Flyways could emphasize that the responsibility of refuge programs goes beyond maintaining a refuge, but also as a key partner in monitoring.