



BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE I
Chair: Judy Camuso (ME)
Vice-Chair: Tony Wilkinson (NY)

Tuesday, 9 March 2021
All times are in Central Time

North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference

Agenda

Judy Camuso- Lessons to carry forward from the pandemic

- More and more people appreciating the outdoors
- We have demonstrated resilience, and that we can change behavior; this is encouraging for how we will move forward in our conservation world.

Climate is a priority for the Biden administration, as is diversity/equity/inclusion/justice; this is an exciting opportunity and is relevant for the bird conservation community. We have an exciting opportunity to change what conservation looks like in this country.

US Fish & Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Program Updates

Ken Richkus, Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management

Kari Duncan, Chief, Division of Bird Habitat Conservation

[See Ken and Kari's slides online for more details.](#)

Biden Administration Priorities include: COVID-19, racial equity, strengthen economy, and take a government-wide approach to climate crisis. Climate elements include the creation of a national climate task force, creating a civilian climate corps, and the 30x30 initiative (conserving our nation's lands and waters).

See slides for personnel changes; they have added 12+ new staff to the migratory bird program over the last year.

Budget: FY2021 Enacted Budget is relatively flat from 2020; slight increase for Joint Ventures and North American Waterfowl Management Plan, and small increase for North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

COVID Pandemic- impacts on USFWS Migratory Bird Programs- USFWS canceled several major surveys for the year, including mid-continent sandhill crane survey and May waterfowl breeding population and habitat survey. USFWS used long-term datasets and existing harvest strategies to inform harvest decisions for 2021-22 hunting seasons. Continued border restrictions with Canada are a challenge, and the Eastern Ecological Research Center is working on approval to fully resume the Breeding Bird Survey.

Double-Crested Cormorants: Look for notes from Bird-Fish Related Conflict WG meeting for more details. USFWS published final rule on December 29th, 2020, that established a special permit for state and tribal governments, which is meant to address conflicts with minimal take and help state-and tribal fish and wildlife agencies manage aquaculture facilities. USFWS is looking to

stand up an implementation team and a monitoring team. They ask the Flyway Councils to identify 2 nongame and 1 game technical committee representatives to work with these teams in a partnership.

Federal Duck Stamp: \$1.1+ billion raised since 1934, with 6 million acres conserved. 1.5+ million stamps sold annually. First day of 2021 sale will be June 25. 28 states enrolled in e-Stamp program.

Grants and Cooperative Agreement: NAWCA- 2021- MBCC approved 32 US Standard Grants and 28 US small grants. Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act- funded 32 projects in 2020. Received 56 applications in 2021.

Training- Forests for the Birds- USFWS Forest Ecology Working Group is collaborating with National Conservation Training Center to develop a 12 month lecture series to address bird population declines, partnership opportunities, and forest management actions to support recovery and sustainability. Series starts the week of March 16. Registration is through NCTC and recordings are available on NCTC archives.

3 Billion Birds Response: All-USFWS approach with 5 part strategy to bring birds back. They will: Leverage all FWS programs to focus efforts and investments in bird conservation; collaborate across the federal government by reinvigorating the Council to Conserve Migratory Birds; accelerate the pace and scale of climate-smart habitat protection under 30x30; reach new audiences; make targeted investments to amplify ongoing actions, focusing on 5 groups of birds- grasslands, shorebirds, forests, aerial insectivores, seabirds.

Moving forward on addressing issues of incidental take – where do we go from here?

Ken Richkus, Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management, USFWS

[See Ken's slides for more details \(starting on page 15\)](#)

In 2015, USFWS started a scoping process to develop a framework to authorize incidental take under the MBTA. In 2017, there was a change in policy due to the M-opinion 35070 that said that the MBTA did not prohibit incidental take. USFWS went through NEPA and rulemaking relative to this, and DOI published a final rule on January 7, 2021. Under the Biden administration, a notice was published to extend the effective date to March 8, 2021, which opened a 20 day public comment period. [See the latest information here](#). On March 8, the DOI rescinded the M-opinion and planned to issue a proposed rule to revoke the corresponding rule.

Questions and Discussion

Judy Camuso: AFWA submitted comments supporting statutory inclusion of incidental take under the MBTA.

Ken: States will have additional opportunities to engage. Withdrawing the rule will go through public comment. Replacement rule authorizing incidental take would need to go through scoping and rulemaking process, so many opportunities for AFWA, Flyways, and states to engage.

Question: USFWS priorities seem to include almost everything but waterfowl. Will there be narrowing of those priorities?

Answer: Waterfowl are included; 3 Billion Birds report showed that waterfowl are doing fairly well, but their habitat are considered under NAWCA. 3 Billion Birds report gave a snapshot of birds that are most in trouble, and they are working on Birds of Conservation Concern lists that will help guide conservation efforts. The Birds of Conservation Concern list will be released later this spring. USFWS recognizes that they will need to prioritize and may explore surrogate species.

Question: How active has the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds been over the last few years, and what are the specific goals for reactivating?

Answer: Council was never rescinded under last administration but wasn't front and center in last administration. Good opportunity to engage federal partners in 3 Billion Birds response, as well as re-engage federal agencies on how to include birds in NEPA processes.

Question: What is the current status regarding incidental take? What rule are we currently operating under?

Answer: As of March 9, the January 7 rule (incidental take not covered) is in effect. They need to formally withdraw this rule through a process under the Administrative Procedures Act.

Paul Schmidt encourages USFWS to narrow down its focus, using the 3 Billion Birds report as guidance.

8:45 Canadian Wildlife Service Update

Ryan Zimmerling, Manager, Migratory Birds and Wildlife Health, Canadian Wildlife Service

[See Ryan's slides for more details.](#)

Natural Climate Solutions: Canadian government is investing ~\$4b over 10 years in natural climate solutions. ~\$3b+ invested over 10 years to plant 2 billion trees across Canada. Looking to plant strategically to help migratory birds and other wildlife. Also investing \$631m over 10 years to restore and enhance wetlands, peatlands, grasslands, and agricultural lands to boost carbon sequestration. \$98.4m over 10 years to establish Natural Climate Solutions for Agricultural Funds.

COVID-19 and Field Work: Still very severe restrictions in Canada, and border is still closed. They will continue priority field work where COVID risk can be mitigated, but there is still uncertainty, and they are working with US to assist with some surveys that would normally be conducted by US partners, in Canada. Doing some modeling on Eastern Waterfowl Survey to assess how reducing survey effort will affect ability to detect short-term trends.

Breeding Bird Survey: Although 2020 survey was canceled, 2021 BBS season is anticipated to go ahead. BBS Action Plan was published on the USGS website on February 2021 and identifies 28 specific actions to help implement the Strategic Plan for the North American BBS (2020-2030).

Canada Nature Fund and Link to International Migratory Birds: \$2.4m with 1:1 match; they are working in 18 countries with 83 partners, currently have conserved 11,000+ hectares of habitat and 3500km of coastline.

Conservation Investment Strategies: Supporting the Shorebird Flyway Plans (including most recent mid-continent flyway shorebird initiative)

Regulatory Changes to US MBTA: Canada had expressed concerns that regulatory changes are not consistent with the objectives of the Migratory Birds Convention. Had several high-level bilateral meetings since April 2020, and Canada formally submitted comments during the draft EIS and delay public comment period. Canadian Minister of the Environment also made a public statement.

Incidental Take: Domestic Efforts: Working on multiple products, including a seabird bycatch project to develop guidelines. Also working to promote bird-friendly city program that address cat predation, collisions, habitat protection, etc, and working on different bird collision reduction and education efforts.

Migratory Bird Regulation Modernization Amendments: Anticipate that the final modernized MBR will be published this spring and come into effect in July 2021. These will include a free youth permit for waterfowl hunters, clarification related to incidental take prohibition, and a new nest provision policy to allow nests to be removed when they no longer serve a purpose.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Updates

Judith Scarl, Bird Conservation Program Manager, AFWA/NABCI Coordinator

[See Judith's slides.](#)

The publication of the 3 Billion Birds paper in the journal Science in September of 2019 galvanized global interest in the bird conservation crisis, both among the public, and also within the conservation community. The bird conservation community is using the momentum from that paper to emphasize the urgency to implement bird conservation, and the importance of moving beyond business as usual to identify and implement conservation actions that will have a big effect. As part of this effort, NABCI and partners are promoting 5 Game Changing Paradigms, ways that we can rally around methods of success.

- Unprecedented diverse, equitable, and inclusive **coalitions** to address the Bird Crisis
- Advanced **science** to identify the limiting factors of bird declines
- **Road Maps** for population recovery and full life cycle conservation
- Bold, new **legislative** agenda
- Unified **messaging** to bring back 3 billion birds

We need to better understand human behaviors, land use, consumption, and distribution, because these can be major drivers of bird population declines and will influence who should be part of our unprecedented coalitions. The US population has increased ~70% in the last 50 years, and population demographics have changed in that time, increasing the urgency to link bird conservation goals to other human goals and outcomes, and engage broader demographics in conservation.

NABCI's [Field Guide to Developing Partnerships](#) outlines how to develop partnerships with organizations we have historically not engaged with much, especially private organizations whose primary focus is not birds or even conservation. It focuses on:

- Looking beyond birds to find partners- identifying broad societal benefits to bird conservation- like water quality/availability, human health and community well-being, and resilient landscapes;
- Reaching out and communicating: overview of considerations for reaching out to new partners and tips on understanding your audience and communicating;
- Developing relationships: strategies for building relationships and trust, including going through some common pitfalls of relationship development.
- Overview of partnership opportunities: foundations, corporations, individuals, and NGOs- and some of the considerations for partnering with organizations in each of these categories.

Download the [full field guide](#), an [Executive Summary](#), or a [worksheet](#) to walk through the concepts from the document.

NABCI's Relevancy Initiative includes an updated Relevancy Toolkit, called [Shared Outcomes for Birds and People](#), with more examples on how bird habitat is linked to human health, the value of birds and bird habitat for ecotourism, and other categories. Examples of how information from the Relevancy Toolkit is used include the "[Why Care About Birds](#)" campaign from March-April 2020, and a set of new international bird conservation fact sheets, aimed at governments, impact investors, and environmental organizations in Central and South America ([download at the bottom of NABCI's Relevancy Toolkit page](#)).

NABCI is also building a Community of Practice for issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, where the bird conservation community can share lessons learned and strategies, and hold each other accountable for commitments.

Bringing Back 3 Billion Birds: Update and Opportunities for State Engagement

Todd Fearer, Coordinator, Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture

Ken Rosenberg, Senior Research Associate and Applied Conservation Scientist, Cornell University/American Bird Conservancy

Sarah Kendrick, State Ornithologist, Missouri Department of Conservation

Sara Schweitzer, Wildlife Diversity Coordinator, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

[See presentation slides.](#)

In 2019, AFWA passed a resolution recognizing the seriousness and urgency of the loss of bird abundance across North America and committed to joining the response. States have a critical role to play in population recoveries. Many coordinated responses are happening, such as Road to Recovery science workshops, NABCI's relevancy work, 5 Game Changing Paradigms, USFWS response (including Forest Ecology Working Group mentioned earlier), etc.

Road to Recovery Initiatives (Ken Rosenberg)

This is a moment in time for conservation that has a chance to change our societal consciousness and how we approach bird conservation. Call to re-imagine bird conservation, and we need to be more strategic and focused on where to implement conservation actions. In many cases we don't really know the specific causes of species declines. Road to Recovery Initiative (one of five game changers) is now being led by Paul Schmidt, who is Acting Director of the initiative. Initial focus is on identifying causes of declines for species that are in danger of becoming threatened or endangered ("Species on the Break"). This is the Road to Recovery approach- fill key knowledge gaps to advance these species toward recovery. Focus is on recovering populations, rather than just a habitat approach.

Road to Recovery workshops in July and December 2020, looking at causes of declines and migratory connectivity. Purpose is to equip the scientific community with the tools we need to fill in these knowledge gaps.

Importance of emphasizing that conservation works, using waterfowl and the dedicated funding and programs for this group as a model to replicate successes for other birds. Why hasn't conservation been working for declining non-game birds? Thoughts that conservation isn't happening at large enough scales to counteract negative forces of habitat loss, anthropogenic mortality, and climate change. Ken notes that it will cost ~\$45 million just to get the science to know where to target conservation, and that is the annual expenditure of NAWCA, which is 10x the funding we have in the NMBCA for all other migratory birds combined.

Proposed Solutions and the State Agency Role (Sarah Kendrick)

States have historically targeted populations of birds, identified reasons for decline, and succeeded at population recovery (Wood Duck, Canada Goose, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey)- this approach can work.

Consider state or regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need and work to move these up the pyramid. Consider partnering across borders using competitive State Wildlife Grants or multi-state grants, for example.

Short-term state action includes supporting Southern Wings and incorporating full life cycle conservation into State Wildlife Action Plan provisions. Southern Wings usually needs a high-level advocate within an agency; let's build those advocates. Missouri SWAP has a "Multi-State and International Collaboration" section, and other states can use this as a template, if desired.

Conservation Planning (Sara Schweitzer)

Many conservation planning efforts are underway that states are engaged with, including joint ventures, Partners in Flight Eastern Working Group efforts, 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan updates, Lower Colorado River multi-species conservation program, and state planning for RAWA funding. North Carolina has strategic plan for RAWA funds. (Other states are doing this as well, including Maine.)

Despite these opportunities, we still have a capacity gap- we need to be more efficient and targeted to be most effective, and we need more multi-state coordination across ranges. These needs could be met with conservation delivery specialists, proposed by Partners in Flight to help with capacity gap.

Judy Camuso's comments: Challenge is determining the priorities; how do we decide which projects to undertake, how do we prioritize the list of birds? This can be tough for states, and as we look at the State Wildlife Action Plans, we may need to do a better job of prioritizing actions. Sarah Kendrick: We can get stuck because we're not doing it all, so let's start somewhere- pick one of your most threatened species and partner across states in that species' range.

Additional Comments

- Need to better coordinate across federal programs, especially where objectives are counterproductive or competing (example: Greater Prairie Chickens in WI, some Farm Bill programs prioritize planting trees where other groups are trying to restore prairie chickens)
- Response: That is one of the reasons that the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds was established, to get these programs in sync. Recommendation to work problems like this through the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Bring Birds Back Package for the 117th Congress

Stanley Senner, Vice President for Bird Conservation, National Audubon Society

Steve Holmer, Vice President of Policy, American Bird Conservancy

See the [Bring Birds Back Package Recommendations](#).

Identifies institutional barriers to success, including that migratory bird conservation is underfunded and understaffed, conservation plans are missing or outdated, minimal support for national/regional coordination, monitoring is incomplete and data is unsynthesized, land and water conservation lack priorities, etc. Last spring, Audubon and ABC assessed policies and programs that make up federal bird conservation and looked at whether these authorities need modification and what new authorities do we need. They lay out policies that serve to address threats (Migratory Bird Protection Act, Bird-Safe Building Act, etc), research/planning/evaluation (Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, Bird Conservation Plans, etc).

Note 1988 amendments for Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, which establish an agenda for federal migratory bird conservation that goes beyond the MBTA; this Act needs to be reauthorized and revitalized, including a provision calling for the identification of lands and waters necessary for conservation of migratory birds throughout the Western Hemisphere; this could provide a roadmap for 30x30 and help prioritize other bird funding.

Additional policy options under themes of Land and Water Conservation (North American Grassland Conservation Act, etc), Funding and Partnerships (NMBCA, RAWA, MJBVs, songbird conservation stamp, etc)

Status and Updates

Migratory Bird Protection Act will soon be reintroduced, along with conversations about incidental take permitting system.

Flocking to Watch Birds in a Global Pandemic

Sarah Kendrick, State Ornithologist, Missouri Department of Conservation

[See slides for details](#)

Birding and spending time outdoors have increased during the pandemic. Big jump in downloads of Cornell's Merlin Bird ID app (78% increase), and views of Cornell's live bird cams went up 45%. eBird experiences ~20% growth each year and can be used to track status and trends of birds throughout the world, and can be used for conservation.

eBird use can feed into states' relevancy roadmap conversations, since birders are one group that are outside and using public lands. eBird checklists can be used to quantify interest in birds and birdwatching. In spring and early summer 2020, new registrations for eBird yard lists (birds you see at your home) were up 900%. During Global Big Day- May 9, 2020- which encourages birders to detect as many species as possible in a 24 hour period, eBirders detected 60% of all bird species on the planet. In Central America's Global Big Day, they detected 80% of all Central American birds in 24 hours. In 2020 eBird, number of checklists was up 26% over 2019, which is the biggest annual growth to date. And eBird may be one of the only ways we can quantify the public's response to nature during the pandemic. These number can quantify where birds are going, how far they traveled, and how many people they are birding with- this is valuable data to states. Can also look at trends just on state managed lands.

Learn more at [AFWA's Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group Webinar](#) from 2-4pm Eastern time on June 9, 2021: The Power of eBird: Relevancy through Quantifying Birders and Birding. (Link above is direct link to access webinar; no registration required.)

Final Report on Grassland Working Group National Assessment

Bill White, Community and Private Land Conservation Branch Chief at Missouri

Department of Conservation, Grassland Working Group Chair

Amanda Haverland, Grasslands Conservation Associate, American Bird Conservancy

Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Jane Fitzgerald, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture Coordinator, American Bird Conservancy

Background: BCC Grassland Working Group formed in 2016 to address four tasks:

- Develop a resolution outlining grassland bird crisis and prioritizing grassland bird conservation (Completed)
- Facilitate evaluation of tri-national grassland habitats and bird conservation efforts (Complete/Ongoing)
- Develop an NCN to address grassland bird conservation needs (Completed)
- AFWA encourage prioritization of grassland bird conservation funding (Ongoing)

Developed a pilot trinational evaluation of grassland conservation efforts in Midwest; realized they needed a dedicated staff member to oversee these efforts, and funded a position through a multi-state conservation grant under the grassland NCN.

International Assessment/Gap Analysis of Current Grassland Conservation Efforts (see slides)

Aim to map multi-national grassland habitat programs and bird conservation efforts. Can help determine where collaboration efforts and funding are needed. Group developed a survey asking about programs that address grassland habitats, primarily on private lands. Participants could also include map data to indicate location of programs.

Team collected data from 2 states and 1 province in Pacific Flyway; 14 states and 1 province in MS Flyway; 10 states and 3 provinces in Central Flyway, and 12 states in Atlantic Flyway. 47% of programs focused on birds; 24% had primary habitat focus. Top funding sources were Farm Bill (22%) and State/Province funding (20%), with 50% of total grassland conservation programs either state/provincial or federal.

We can use this gap analysis to evaluate whether these priority geographies are matching whether species occur. Several programs are very broad; are state-level programs too broad?

[Explore the gap analysis map online.](#)

[Also, check out the Gap Analysis Story Map.](#) It provides an overview of the gap analysis methods and results, as well as an overview of the need for this gap analysis and a discussion of the results.

Regional Flyway Summits- Central Flyway Summit and Roadmap (see slides)

Roadmap will bring efforts together for grassland conservation. There is a [newsletter](#) to keep the community informed. Group is identifying goals for the next 1-3 years including research gaps, policy, partnerships, communications, and conservation delivery. They have a dedicated community contributing from 3 countries and across 8 sectors; forming working groups to take the Roadmap from regional to state level. Some of the Working Group priorities include identifying Canadian and Mexican priorities to elevate, working with Indigenous and First Nations, policy, community surveys on priorities to evaluate local relevance, and looking at how roadmap can elevate NRCS Great Plains framework. State Working Group meeting on April 8th that will look at state alignment for priorities and highlight some state work.

Roadmap Priorities include: Increase support of collaborative initiatives and funding for what works; build legislative or farm bill-AG policy tools that create incentive-based programs and innovate existing tools; support training and speakers bureau; create a public messaging campaign to garner support for grasslands and rural communities.

Metrics of success include: acres protected/enhanced/restored; bird population level trends stabilized; GIS layers of people/natural resources/opportunities for investment, etc.

Regional Flyway Summits- Mississippi Flyway Summit (see slides)

MS Flyway Region has also developed a roadmap for this region as well, looking at Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Almost all of the grasslands in the MS Flyway region have already been converted, so a “no net loss” of grasslands policy will not be sufficient to recover SGCN. Sometimes when there are grassland landscapes there is still not appropriate habitat for

grassland-associated species; there is room to improve this habitat. This is a different situation than the Central Grasslands, where there is more intact habitat to conserve.

Goal of the MS Flyway Region grassland effort was to develop a MS Flyway-scale action plan (roadmap) to better tailor grassland initiatives to the specific conservation strategies, policies, and resources needed to recover an array of grassland taxa of conservation concern. [See the document and associated videos online](#). Note that there are two primary causes of species declines are: 1) conversion of native prairie grasslands to other land uses, primarily agricultural; 2) suppression of fire. Conservation challenges include restoring and managing the composition and structure of grassland habitats in ways that make them biologically functional for SGCN, and providing adequate amounts of habitat in patch sizes and configurations that support species with relatively large area requirements and/or poor dispersal capabilities.

Development of the Midcontinent Shorebird Conservation Initiative

Brad Andres, National Coordinator, US Shorebird Conservation Partnership

[See presentation for more details.](#)

Existing hemispheric-scale shorebird initiatives on Atlantic and Pacific Flyways; now filling in the midcontinent gap for shorebirds. These Flyway approaches place local actions in flyway contexts, facilitate collaboration at the scales necessary to conserve migratory shorebirds and their habitats, integrate efforts to secure funding, and complement other large-scale plans (like the Central Grasslands Roadmap) and other domestic and international initiatives.

Elements of the Midcontinent Shorebird Conservation Initiative (MSCI): Build a strategic framework through a logical process and practitioner engagement throughout the midcontinent Americas Flyway, continue to engage a broad partnership steering committee to guide development and promote implementation, and develop new and leverage existing revenue streams to accomplish implementation. Looking at the big international lending institutions (e.g. World Bank) to evaluate opportunities to incorporate shorebird objectives.

See map associated with presentation for MSCI Geography and Focal Species.

These efforts also encourage designating regional species of greatest conservation need as an opportunity to work together.

The Framework for the strategy uses the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, which is similar to the Atlantic and Pacific processes, and which will ensure consistent products in the North and South America. Partner input gathered through virtual workshops, including engaging states via non-game technical committees of Flyways. Now in the process of incorporating feedback and refining open standards products.

30x30 Initiative: Working Across State and Flyway Boundaries for Conservation

Deborah Rocque, Assistant Director for Science Applications, US Fish and Wildlife Service

DOI is focusing on racial equity piece; this will be locally driven, science based, and respectful of tribal nations and existing user groups. 30x30 is about setting a goal and bringing people together; many of today's presentations have individual goals, and 30x30 can help stitch these things together. Goal will be achieved through multiple mechanisms, including working lands and conservation easements. Deb [read a study](#) that demonstrates that the economic benefits of conserving and restoring natural areas outweighs the profit potential of converting them to

extensive human use. There is finally broad recognition that natural and healthy ecosystems are key to human health and prosperity. Conservation is increasingly relevant globally and domestically, and this is a responsibility. Still many questions about where and how much. In early March, Southeast AFWA Directors established the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy Steering Committee as a formal standing Committee of SEAFWA, and formalized state-federal oversight of SECAS partnership. This is a good example of working across boundaries and agencies. Birds can be the key towards measuring our success in conserving 30% of lands and waters. Use the power of birds to help sustain landscapes at the levels we need, and bird conservation can be the leaders!