Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Migratory Shorebird and Upland Game Bird Working Group

September 11, 2018 Meeting Summary

**HIP Updates**

Shaun Oldenburger (TX) provided a summary of where the HIP revision is at and what was discussed at the HIP subcommittee meeting. Five states have agreed to participate in the proposed effort that was funded (via a multi-state grant) with WMI. There is room for 8 states if others are interested. Implementation will likely be 2020. FWS will be an important partner in this work. The proposal includes getting rid of third party vendors asking HIP questions at the point of sail. Instead states would set up a system for hunters to answer the questions online.

**Woodcock Updates**

Russ Mason (MI) summarized the recommendations that came from the Mississippi Flyway regarding woodcock regulations, including earlier opening date and lowering the liberal/moderate threshold. The SRC denied these changes, and requested the Woodcock Harvest Strategy Working Group be restarted to review these issues. Russ mentioned an increase in days (60-75, etc.), possibility of zoning, and lowering the threshold from 3.25 to 3 as all options that will be explored. The group will get together, and will then come back to the flyways for discussion/review.

There was a discussion about woodcock research and new information, including the importance of mid-latitude stopover sites, success of young forest initiatives, and some of the information that came out of recent telemetry work by Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and other partners. Regarding the forest initiatives, they are typically run by foresters at the state level, which we typically don’t see at these meetings, so new ways to engage these folks could be explored. The US Forest Service also has interest in engaging in more wildlife friendly work through their good neighbor authority, which could perhaps overlap with woodcock efforts. The Woodcock society offered their assistance with any efforts to coordinate this process. This group could be a good avenue to work through some woodcock habitat issues in the future.

**Priority Needs Documents**

This was initially discussed these at the March meeting. Alicia Hardin (NE) sent out a survey to get an idea of where we are at with these. She had 17 responses, some from all flyways. The survey asked participants to provide their input on what priority needs were completed, in progress/continuing, not started, or don’t know. Alicia provided a powerpoint summary of the results. Overall, the most progress seems to have been made in the cranes and doves, which have already been or are in the process of being updated. Woodcock progress was intermediate. The rails, snipe, coots, and other dove species were all still limited in the amount of progress that has been made.

Rich Schultheis provided an update to the status of the mourning and white-winged dove priority needs update. This was initiated at the National Dove Task Force meeting in October 2017. Dove management units/flyways then had the opportunity to prioritize, add to, and comment on what the task force developed as a long list/starting point. The task force will now try to finalize a list of priority information needs at their meeting in October 2018. One issue that needs to be worked through is how to handle priority information needs that are likely to be addressed by the USFWS and partners vs those that are more likely to be addressed by other researchers.

**NABCI Information**

Judith Scarl (AFWA) provided a document to the group summarizing NABCI bird conservation priorities. This working group has worked quite a bit within the research priority. These priorities are all things to consider for future issues and what the group should consider.

Alicia Hardin (NE) provided a summary of an effort that came out of the private lands stewardship subcommittee as part of NABCI. They are suggesting a private lands staff forum, as a way to ensure well informed field staff interacting with landowners regarding grassland bird issues. The forum could provide training and mentoring, exchange of ideas, and help for private lands staff to effectively deliver farm bill and other conservation programs. There was some HD work done regarding this effort, and the survey work suggests it would be very useful for private lands staff. The issues we run into now is that field staff don’t typically attend meetings like these, so a different type of forum is necessary. Alicia suggested an endorsement of this idea be an action item to carry forward to the BCC, and there was agreement from the group. They are also looking for interested parties to carry this forward. Folks interested could contact Alicia or Todd Fearer. We will also consider these priorities with our work plan for this group

**MBTA Solicitors Opinion Update**

After a good discussion in the first session of the Bird Conservation Committee (BCC), there are some potential action items on the table regarding how to respond to the M opinion. Responses that were brought up at the BCC included compiling best management practices (BMPs) to avoid take, pursuing state-level legislation changes, corresponding/questioning the interpretation with the DOI, challenging the interpretation with a lawsuit, and pursuing federal legislation changes. There are already 3 different lawsuits regarding this interpretation, some involving states. It appears that the BCC and the executive committee feel like putting together BMPs and providing some template legislation for states who might choose to pursue that option are the options that are likely to be pursued at this point.

**Webless Research Program Update**

Ken Richkus provided an update on funds for this program. He recognized the concern by many about lack of funding. Since 2017, it has been around $50,000. The good news is It is still a line item in the budget. The bad news is there are not currently any plans to increase the amount of money. Remote infrared sensing of cranes on the Platte River was funded with funds from 2017. In 2018, the $50,000 has not been spent yet. That money is still available, and hopefully there will be another 50K for ‘19, so a total of $100,000 to use next year. As other projects are completed (modernization of HIP, etc), there is potential for more funds to be turned to this program. The question Ken posed to the group was what we do with that money. Do we fund projects, put out an RFP, or what do we use the money for? One option would be to use some of that money to revisit the priority needs. Some input was provided on different options, including taking that question back to the flyway tech committees to see what their purview would be. Mark Seamans is still the point person for the webless program. Mark also has a document that summarized where we are on some of the priority needs updates that Ken can send out, to compliment the survey Alicia did.

**Work Plan Update**

A draft work plan was handed out at the meeting, but will be revised and sent out to the group.