Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Work Group Meeting Notes

March 29, 2018 Norfolk, Virginia

USFWS Update – Ken Richkus

Personnel and Organization - Ken provided an update to personnel changes in the migratory bird program. Retirements included Brad Bortner, Jerry Thompson, Tim Bowman, and Shawn Kelly. There has also been a reorganization from three to two branches. The new branches are Monitoring and Data Management, and Assessment and Decision Support. There should be final communication coming out regarding this in the coming weeks.

SRC and Regs – The final rule for federal frameworks will likely be published in May. Changes included RMP Cranes to 60 days/3 splits, EMU dove was extended to January 31, and this will be the first year for changes in the southern Texas dove zone.

The next SRC meeting will be via video-teleconference on June 6th. The fall meeting is October 16th-17th(?).

Expanded Hunting – Ken briefly summarized secretarial order 3356, regarding expanded hunting access on refuges. He also mentioned the potential of expanding refuge participation in banding programs.

Webless funding – Ken was asked about plans for funding for the webless research funds program. Ken acknowledged that all staff involved recognize this as a valued program that has addressed many research priorities for webless species, but support continues to dwindle and funding has been directed toward other priorities at this time, including modernization of harvest surveys and the permitting program. The completion of this process might free up funding in the future that is currently spend on postage, etc. For the current year, approximately $50,000 was available for webless funding, and it was directed toward a project on remote sensing of cranes.

Modified Call Count Survey Update – Shaun Oldenburger

The National Dove Task Force Initiated this project to address the need for information in the event of a closed season for mourning doves, and the need for an alternative method for the population estimation of mourning doves. Equipment for this project was funded by the webless program that was just discussed. The project involves running a small number of call count surveys that were historically run, with the addition of distance sampling methodology. State agencies were responsible for running and coordinating these surveys for a three year period (2015-2017). The three surveys are now completed. The project used Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs). Preliminary results that Shaun presented indicated that good consistency in patterns across years and estimated densities in BCRs. Overall estimates were in the 40-60 million dove range for The EMU, 120 million range for the CMU, and 30-35 million dove range for the WMU. Overall, the CVs met the objectives, and reasonable population estimates were produced with a cheap and reliable survey protocol. Further analysis will be available in the next year.

Jim Kelley had a question regarding truncation, which was at the 10% level.

Ken Richkus asked about comparisons to what is being estimated with current methods. Those comparisons are ongoing, and will be available to discuss next year.

Mid-Continent Sandhill Crane Plan Update – Shaun Oldenburger

Shaun covered the recent update to the plan, which was just signed off on by the three western flyways involved at council meetings this week. The last update was in 2006. Since that time, more work has been done with the four breeding affiliations. The recent update included a 90% threshold for a count to be included in the three year average, an adjustment to the timing of the survey, and the addition of formalized harvest reductions and threshold values.

HIP Task Force – Dave Morrision

The issues with HIP are well documented, and this group was formed to help address those issues. Ross Melinchuk was the chair. He has moved on from his position with TPWD. Karen Waltrip was selected as vice chair, and may be heading up the group moving forward. There are five states that have expressed interest in participating in a pilot program, North Carolina, Louisiana, Arizona, Colorado, and Minnesota. A small group has been formed to continue progress with this project. It sounds like the funding request that was submitted might potentially be approved, which will move the timeline up, and will require some quick turnaround on this. Letter of Intents are due in early May. Discussion has been a 2019 or 2020 start for the pilot. The good news is there continues to be movement on this pilot project.

Paul Padding asked about an opt out option for states that do not want to participate. The plan still is for this to be a completely voluntary program, with only states that are interested in signing on doing so.

Judith Scarl mentioned the other steps that need to occur, including communication with hunters and states.

Woodcock Task Force Update – Jim Kelley

Jim passed out and discussed the notes included below. Following his summary, Rich Schultheis suggested that if the Woodcock Task Force is going to remain within this working group, we should probably review the work plan and objectives and incorporate some woodcock issues. There was also a question regarding the need to update the conservation plan, but Jim thought that might be a bit premature.

*AFWA Woodcock Task Force – March 28, 2018 Norfolk, VA*

*Chairman Russ Mason (MI DNR) convened the meeting at 1:05 PM and adjourned at 3 PM*

*Al Stewart gave a review of the 11th American Woodcock Symposium held in Roscommon, Michigan October 24-27, 2017. Many of the papers were to address the woodcock priority information needs developed in 2010 by the AFWA Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Working Group. There were 150 attendees. Proceedings will be available sometime in late summer 2018.*

*Steve Weber (WMI) gave an update on the WMI Young Forest Initiative. 2006-7 work started with about 30 contractors. Just finished writing report for final grant under Keystone Initiative with NFWF. Forest Inventory Analysis data shows decline in 0-20 year age class percentage and total acres of forestland declining. Results from an analysis of the SGS index and density estimates (2007-2017) shows that during the last 11 years there has been decline of 2.6% in woodcock populations. If Canada is not included in the analysis there is actually a 6.7% increase in the population of singing males. Continue to pursue small grant opportunities. Some grants associated with New England cottontail habitat work.*

*Jim Kelley (USFWS) gave a brief overview of the woodcock harvest strategy and recent proposals by Flyway Councils to modify regulatory thresholds….*

*Brent Rudolph (RGS) gave an update on some personnel changes within the Ruffed Grouse Society. Information the American Woodcock Society (formed in 2014) was also presented. Formation of the Woodcock Society helped expand the range of activities formerly addressed by the RGS. RGS/AWS are increasing the number of conservation alliances they are members of. Two new forest wildlife specialists hired in northern Wisconsin.*

*Results of a woodcock migration study conducted by Joe Moore in the Central Management Region were presented. The study examined temporal patterns, migration area connectivity, identify priority conservation areas. 75 transmitters deployed on 21 trap sites split between northern and southern ends of migration routes. 61 successfully tracked, 88 migration pathways, 19,604 locations, and 377 migratory stopover areas. Migration duration avg 31.2 days in fall. Spring migration duration avg 53.2 days. More stopovers in spring, sites closer together in spring, little difference in stopover duration. Birds captured in MN, WI, MI and most stayed in Central Region (2 went to EMR). If captured in south, birds mostly stayed in CMR but fair number went to EMR. Migration pathways show areas where migration habitat work may need to be focused.*

*The design of a similar migration study to be conducted in the Eastern Management Region was also presented. Goal is to mark 160+ birds over 3 years. First year was fall 2017, and 6 transmitters were deployed as a pilot. Public outreach on the projects can be found at* [*www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/woodcockmigration*](http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/woodcockmigration) *Additional funding still being sought, as well as additional cooperators.*

*Members of the Task Force had a brief discussion on whether to pursue leaving the umbrella of the Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Working Group (MSUGB) in order to form a new Woodcock Working Group as was brought up at the March 2017 AFWA meeting. In 2017, the Bird Conservation Committee felt that if a new Working Group was formed it should be broader than just woodcock, and that a young forest working group should be formed. Members at the 2018 Task Force meeting felt the focus should remain on woodcock and the Task Force should remain under the MSUGB Working Group*

Species Management Plans – Alicia Hardin

Alicia brought a copy of the famous purple book that has been referenced a number of times in previous meetings. She inquired about the need to update the information in this book, given it was a product of this working group. A discussion ensued about the additional priority information needs documents that exist for webless species, and where to find them. It was suggested that at the fall meeting, we spend some time looking at these documents and discuss where we are as far as necessary updates. There was a recent update to the crane document, and there is an update for the dove document in progress through the dove task force. However, some of these documents have yet to be updated.

MBTA Opinion – Judith Scarl

AFWA has been reaching out to states to look at what state regulations exist in relation to this issue. The BCC is trying to assemble a team to help to address this, and they are looking for volunteers. There is often hesitation from states to provide input on this issue to avoid being at odds with different components of their state government. It was suggested that working through the flyways might be a good way to solicit this input

Dove Task Force – Rich Schultheis

Rich provided a summary of activities of the dove task force in the last year. Plans continue to move forward for rewarding banding to begin in 2019. The MOU that is being worked out for the mallard effort will be a good development for dove reward banding as well. Regarding changes to HIP stratification questions that are being considered, the task force recommended that before changes are made, staff from harvest surveys is looped into the process, and survey work is done with states to see how changes would affect them and what timeframe changes could be made. There was good progress made in updating the priority information needs document for doves, and that work will continue at the meeting next fall. It is not expected that a final list would be ready by next fall, but possibly within a year. Finally the group discussed updates to the dove harvest strategy, including moving toward a balanced equation. Progress has continued in exploring the potential of going that direction, but in the next year updates would be limited to smaller issues like updating information and thresholds. The task force continues to meet in October annually, and will continue to report back to this group with progress on these issues.

The meeting ended with a discussion of items to present to the BCC. It was decided that there were no action items from the meeting today, but an update will be given. At the next meeting in fall, updates to priority needs documents will again be on the agenda.