



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE PART I

Chair: Gordon Myers, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Vice-Chair: Ross Melinchuk, TX Parks and Wildlife Department

8 March 2017, 1:00 pm-5:00 pm
North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference
Spokane, WA

US Fish & Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Program Updates

Brad Bortner, Division Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management

Sarah Mott, Division Chief, Division of Bird Habitat Conservation

[View this presentation online](#); most talking points are available as text in the slides.

Division of Migratory Bird Management

Migratory Bird Treaty Centennial: Many thanks to state and NGO partners for their participation. As a result of the Centennial, the US and Canada rolled out a Vision for the Future of Bird Conservation in December.

Personnel: Branch chief vacancies have been filled, but currently there is a government hiring freeze, so USFWS has no current plans to hire a waterbird coordinator.

Budget: Currently a Continuing Resolution until April 28, funded slightly below last year's funding levels. The best case scenario appears to be a continuation of funding at last year's levels, with this slight rescission; they are waiting for the President's Budget.

Hunting: Published proposed regulations on 9 Feb; USFWS is proposing a liberal duck season for this fall with an increased black duck bag limit and a decrease in northern pintail bag limit. Progress continues on revision of adaptive harvest management protocols for mid-continent mallards.

Eagles: Eagle permit rule revisions are in effect as of 17 Jan 2017. USFWS is working with regions to develop guidance on implementation; implementation protocols expected to be finalized this spring. Major points of change include: 1) scale of eagle management units (originally under recovery population of management units, now proposing to manage on a flyway basis). Note that USFWS does have provisions for measuring impacts for local populations. 2) Permit tenure changed from 5 to up to 30 years. Note that USFWS does not intend to issue permits to take 8,000 bald eagles, but that is the level of take that could take place.

Surveys show that golden eagles are essentially stable, but there is no authorized take without compensatory mitigation.

Incidental Take under MBTA: Published Notice of Intent and went through process to develop regulations, but now waiting for new guidance.

Director's Order 219: On Jan 19, 2017, USFWS Director Dan Ashe signed an order on lead ammunition and fishing tackle, which was subsequently revoked by Secretary Zinke on 3/2/17. Revocation does not change non-toxic shot regulations for waterfowl hunting.

Conflict species Management: Trying to develop consistent framework/template to address conflict species management for species such as black vultures, ravens, and cormorants. This will involve standard operating procedures where USFWS will work with partners to ID a problem statement,

what is known/not known, what data is needed. Key components for consideration include mutual objectives, partner involvement, process to identify cumulative take, etc (see slide).

MBTA Protected Species List: Species are protected on a family basis under MBTA; with American Ornithological Society changes in taxonomy, USFWS is developing the first update of this list since 2013, expected to finalize the update in 2017.

Birds of Conservation Concern: USFWS has a Congressionally mandated requirement to prepare a list of species that are highest conservation concern; USFWS is updating this list for the first time since 2008.

Division of Bird Habitat Conservation

US Shorebird Conservation Partnership: Pacific Americas Shorebird Conservation Strategy to be released this month. \$500,000 of US AID money will go to help implement this plan and the Atlantic Shorebird Conservation Strategy..

Partners in Flight: New website, www.partnersinflight.org, will be available by end of March/early April. Conservation Landbird Plan will continue to be available, as well as resources for management and International Migratory Bird Day. PIF is moving into habitat delivery through the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures and policy development; shift from planning to implementation.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act: See slide for grant amounts; note that in 2017 the only grants awarded to date are for two Gulf Spill projects. Because of the continuing resolution, USFWS currently can't award funding for projects that have been approved. Those awards will be made when the FY2017 budget is finalized.

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act: See slide for grant amounts and locations.

Migratory Bird Joint Ventures: The Association of Joint Venture Management Boards was in DC the last week in February talking about the importance of JVs. Northern Great Plains JVs working on grassland management practices that are good for birds and people. NRCS-JV collaboration is expanding.

Federal Duck Stamp: No drop in sales after 2015-2016 duck stamp price increase. 23 states eligible to participate in eStamp.

Questions:

Does revising the list of MBTA species provide an opportunity to look at Muscovy Duck and Purple Swamp Hen again, with the policy implications of those being on the list? (Diane Eggeman)

These species are jurisdictional under MBTA where they are native in US. Where they cause problems, USFWS tries to help control problems. There is no easy way to remove protection for them and open the floodgates for this removal in other places.

To learn more information about non-traditional duck stamp sales (beyond hunters) email Sarah Mott.

Messaging to Support a Strong USFWS Migratory Bird Program

Diane Eggeman, Director, Hunting and Game Management Division, FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

[View powerpoint online.](#)

Background: In September 2016, Brad Bortner presented on the USFWS Migratory Birds program budget, and the Bird Conservation Committee discussed how to support a strong budget for migratory birds. Diane presents a slide demonstrating the budget of respective USFWS programs, demonstrating a loss in Migratory Birds compared to other programs. In 2016, Paul Schmidt offered two pieces of advice: 1) build relationships with regional USFWS directors; 2) Engage in summer discussions with Congress. The Bird Conservation Committee drafted both general and waterfowl-specific messaging on this topic last fall (see slides 2-4).

Moving Forward: Diane proposes potential next steps for further developing and promoting messaging:

- Organize small group to further develop messages, working with Jen Mock Schaeffer
- Small group to reach out to WGs to get some ideas about priorities
- Committee could develop letter for AFWA to send to Zinke or new director of USFWS
- Encourage states to send letters to Congressional members (coordinating with AFWA)

Discussion (General)

- Do we want to wait until a new director is named? Advice: best not to wait too long (seconded during discussion)
- Current messaging misses the economics of birds from hunting and birdwatching. We need to show how a small investment gets a huge economic payback. (EJ Williams)
- The funding we're asking for provides a foundation for work that state agencies and partners do together. When the government cuts this funding, not just cutting feds, but cutting states. We need to make sure the Secretary of the Interior, White House, etc understand that this is a shared responsibility of migratory birds; it's not just a question of collaboration with states, but a shared jurisdiction. Zinke has already pushed back on 10% proposed cut in president's budget, and now we have to support him and give him good reasons to fight for those cuts (Jen Mock Schaeffer)
- NABCI will be working on programmatic priorities- we should think about how NABCI can be a stronger advocate for bird program funding. That is, focus not just on the message, but on the messenger (Tammy VerCauteren)

Discussion (Science)

- “Standing up for science” is a common theme- perhaps we should communicate partner-driven science messaging and talk about leveraging USFWS investment and the return on investment for USFWS (John Alexander)
- Not everyone outside of scientists understands that science drives science-based management decisions and helps to determine the status of populations. If USFWS is petitioned to list a species but we don't have enough data, decisions will be challenged. Science drives management actions on the ground (Jen Mock Schaeffer)
- The Science Support program in USFWS showed a big increase; is this mixed messaging on a bigger scale about science? (Ken Rosenberg)
- Each USFWS program contributes to migratory bird conservation in some way. What Mig Birds division (and this discussion) focuses on is operational dollars for surveys, Joint Ventures, and partnerships; the Migratory Birds program has not seen new money in a long time, and with increasing costs, their buying power is declining (Brad Bortner)
- Are we missing the point with these messages? We are asking different questions with science. Is the perceived “erosion of science” because we are asking different question? From his standpoint, we are using science better than we ever have, so perhaps we want to attack from the standpoint of “why are the budgets being cut” (Bill Bates)
- There were specific reasons some programs were reduced- not cuts, but reallocations to other programs because of USFWS priority decisions. Impression was that this funding would ultimately come back to the migratory bird program, but it has not (Dean Smith)

Discussion (Action)

- AFWA may submit a letter to the administration. Strategically, should the BCC prepare its own letter, or wrap these messages into a broader letter, where the impact of what we're saying may be diluted? (Ross Melinchuk)
- Would be helpful to have a letter to show support from the broader community; AFWA can also pull this information into its overarching letter to show community support. In addition, if the US gets a

\$1 trillion infrastructure package, we will need more capacity in the Migratory Birds division to deal with upcoming NEPA/survey workload (Jen Mock Schaeffer)

Next Steps:

-Small group consisting of Diane Eggeman, Dave Morrison/Randy Myers, Breck Carmichael, Sara Schweitzer, Judith Scarl, Jen Mock Schaeffer will prepare a draft letter and share with Bird Conservation Committee.

Action for Business Meeting: **Due to ongoing concerns about USFWS funding for the migratory bird program, the Bird Conservation Committee requests that the AFWA President send a letter to USFWS Director that conveys the benefits of the migratory bird program and requests that USFWS increase resources to implement migratory bird conservation across the country.**

Time Frame: The sooner the better

Rick Jacobsen (CT) moves, Arizona seconds to move this action to the business meeting- Committee unanimously votes yes.

Canadian Wildlife Service Update

Barry Smith, Director, Pacific Region

[View presentation online.](#)

CWS' mandate includes species at risk per the federal *Species at Risk Act*, migratory birds as identified under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*, and protected areas under the *Canada Wildlife Act*. At the program level, CWS is developing a new strategic plan that aims to emphasize stewardship first recovering species at risk and addressing conservation threats more generally, which includes a shift to work in focal areas or general threats to achieve conservation efficiencies. CWS is increasingly looking to provinces for leadership on species at risk per the intent of the federal *Species at Risk Act*. The current liberal government's mandate has CWS increasing its focus on species at risk, protected areas, Indigenous Peoples, and Climate Change and Arctic Ecosystems (see slides for details).

Migratory Bird Program- new NABCI Coordinator hired in August 2016. The Migratory Bird Program is moving toward achieving greater attention toward non-game bird species, given the number of non-game species whose populations are continuing to decline.

Migratory Bird Convention in 2016 and 2017 celebration included the Royal Canadian Mint producing commemorative coins, a Bird Year pledge, and [Migratory Bird Ambassadors Project](#) (see slides for more).

Grassland conservation is a priority, and CWS/CEC looking for partners with grassland habitat expertise.

Trilateral Vision for next 100 Years of Bird Conservation: Leading up to development of Vision, which was released in December 2016, leadership of our three countries committed to: 1) Renew and recommit to regional, bilateral, and trilateral activities in support of migratory bird and habitat conservation; 2) Develop a vision for the next 100 years of bird conservation; 3) Exchange information on best practices, promote cooperative and coordinated monitoring and research programs, bring together stakeholders to develop strategies for conservation investment, and expand environmental education and outreach. Input on Hemispheric Vision can be provided by April 15, 2017 by emailing "vision@nabci.net"

Amendments to Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations: Changes include new concept of possession, simplifying/clarifying labelling requirements, prohibition of abandonment of birds, making it easier for youth/new hunters to hunt. Amendments will also reflect inclusivity of Canadian Indigenous people.

Incidental Take: CWS is still interested in the implications of incidental take from a program and conservation perspective, but there is no active incidental take regulatory initiative at this time.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Updates

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

[View presentation online](#). Note: Download presentation to view full notes that accompany and explain each slide.

Background

The US NABCI Committee is a 28-member partnership of federal and state agencies, as well as NGOs and bird-focused partnerships working on national bird conservation issues. Its mission is to facilitate collaborative partnerships that advance biological, social, and scientific priorities for North American bird conservation. NABCI's 2017-2021 Strategic Plan has three primary goals:

Goal 1: Maintain a well-coordinated bird conservation community to achieve strategic conservation.

Goal 2: Facilitate science-based conservation efforts that support healthy bird populations

Goal 3: Inform and support effective policy to advance bird conservation

NABCI's new Vision, *Healthy and abundant populations of North American birds are valued by future generations and sustained by habitats that benefit birds and people*, reflects an acknowledgment that it's critical to tie bird conservation to broader economic, human health, or human well-being benefits.

NABCI's 8 subcommittees each focus on a critical need in the bird conservation community: Communications, Human Dimensions, International, monitoring, Private and Working Lands, State of the Birds, Legislative and Policy, Executive Council. Subcommittee membership is open to anyone, not just NABCI representatives.

Content Updates

National Bird Conservation Social Science Coordinator (NBCSSC): NABCI's HD Subcommittee and partners secured two years of funding for the NBCSSC; Ashley Gramza started her new role, working out of Virginia tech, on 3 January 2017. The goal of this position is to better connect the bird conservation community with social science and will include tasks such as creating a resource directory of social science research, identifying social scientists that can help with specific bird conservation issues, and helping bird conservation practitioners understand how social science can be used to address bird conservation challenges.

NABCI Website: NABCI launched a new website in October 2016 at nabci-us.org; this site provides up-to-date information about NABCI, membership, governance, and Subcommittees, as well as a "Resources" section that links to national bird conservation resources and a "Bird Conservation Community" section that demonstrates how different partnerships and programs fit together and work together for all-bird conservation.

Policy Messaging: NABCI's messaging on five key bird conservation programs (NAWCA, NMBCA, SWG, Farm Bill, Joint Ventures, as well as a document that links these five programs together) is available on its website. In 2017, NABCI will develop a short, focused State of the Birds report focusing on Farm Bill programs and bird conservation.

Targeted Communication: Leadership: NABCI's Executive Council met with USFWS Director Dan Ashe and USDA Under Secretary Robert Bonnie in December 2016 to gain insight on how NABCI can become more relevant to leadership and their agencies (see notes on slide 12 for details of meetings). The Executive Council will meet with incoming leadership to figure out how NABCI can best support these agencies in their missions and bird conservation.

NABCI Next Steps: Implement strategic plan, build stronger ties with NABCI Canada and NABCI Mexico, strengthen ties with policy makers and policy advocates to better inform and support effective funding and policy for bird conservation

Cat Work Group Updates and Discussion

Sara Schweitzer, Wildlife Diversity Biologist, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

[View presentation online.](#)

Background

The issue of feral and free-ranging cats is multidisciplinary, posing health risks and predation impacts to native wildlife. At the North American meeting in 2016, AFWA approved a Work Group whose goal is to clarify that it is contrary to state agencies' stated mission and purpose to have feral and free-ranging cats on state lands specifically managed for viable and sustainable populations of wildlife and their habitats (see slides for actions).

Tasks

Regulatory Language: Group is reviewing existing regulatory language to identify what restrictions currently exist on release, feeding, and/or maintaining feral and free-ranging cats on state lands managed for wildlife conservation, and will compile a document to compare language between states. Currently, language is compiled for all 50 states, and group is checking back with each agency for feedback.

Successful feral cat removal methods and successful examples of wildlife advocate-cat advocate partnerships: These are harder to come by!

Group is also working on a bibliography of resources regarding birds and cats issue. Final product anticipated September 2017.

Note that different people have different values on this issue. We can provide scientific information, but this may not change people's entrenched values. However, state agencies should not move forward without addressing the public, because this is less likely to succeed.

Barry Smith (Canada) indicated that Vancouver wants to be the "greenest city in the world," and addressing cats should be part of that.

Harvest Information Program (HIP) Review Task Group Updates

Ross Melinchuk, Deputy Executive Director, TX Parks and Wildlife

Background

HIP has been around for several decades, and even 15 years ago, some shortcomings were identified, which still exist. For example, in Texas, which harvests more doves than any other state, issued 1.1 million HIP registrations in 2015-2016. However, in a cross-check with hunter license information, only half that many hunters are participating. Although HIP has been the best data source for harvest of some of these migratory species, the magnitude of errors is becoming more obvious. But we rely on this information to manage migratory birds on a national scale.

Working Group Progress

HIP WG formed in 2016, with broad representation. Current status: National Dove Task Force presented a proposal that suggests a national (not federal) system of data collection information. Currently, 49 states collect HIP information differently; this proposal would require states to reexamine how data is collected in each jurisdiction. Next step is to address concerns raised at HIP WG meeting and return with a modified proposal that either proposes solutions to concerns or recommends not pursuing this path.

Legislative Updates

Jen Mock Schaeffer, Government Affairs Director, AFWA

[See legislative summary.](#)

Blue Ribbon Panel Updates

Sean Saville, Blue Ribbon Panel Campaign Manager, AFWA

The goal of the Blue Ribbon Panel efforts were to ensure implementation of state wildlife action plans, at a cost of \$1.3 billion annually. BRP represents broad diversity of interests and a key opportunity to build a major partnership, from oil and gas, to manufacturing, chambers of commerce, etc. AFWA and partners are launching a public relations campaign to build visibility and public support. As part of this effort, we need to recognize contributions from wildlife recreation (both hunting and wildlife watching) to the economy, and incorporate “outdoor recreation economy” into the messaging of the campaign.

BRP Recommendation #1: Congress dedicate up to \$1.3 billion annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program (WCRP).

Progress: Before the close of the 114th Congress, 19 co-sponsors secured for HR5650, and working on securing Senate sponsors for the companion bill. Many states have demonstrated support through passage of resolutions, sending letters, and phone calls to members of Congress- this support is critical. Sample messaging on BRP branding has been developed that conjures a sense of responsibility, ethics, values, and the economics.

Next Steps: Campaign strategy continues with development this spring, including solidifying the branding messaging, launching a public relations campaign, re-introducing a Bill in the house, Fly-in, etc.

Discussion

- Make sure to include economic metrics for the nature industry, including hunting/fishing/birdwatching. Use numbers from report that includes outdoor recreation as a part of the GNP.
- Should states wait to submit letters until legislation is at a specific stage? Answer: Could help if we have a new bill number and bill name- since we're close to reintroduction in the House, maybe wait until information is current.
- Would the \$1.3 billion be permanent funding? Answer: Yes, the goal is to have this funding not subject to Congressional appropriations- we are looking at annual disbursement through WCRP.

Southern Wings Progress Updates

Deb Hahn, International Relations Director, AFWA

[View presentation online.](#)

Last year's Centennial highlights that hundreds of bird species are still declining, and we need new and diverse partnerships and innovative tools to help reverse these declines. Southern Wings is one of these tools for a state agency for on the ground conservation, research/monitoring, etc. To date, states have provided more than \$1.5 million for conservation on our species' wintering grounds. 30 states currently participate.

Southern Wings is putting together outreach materials for states and developing marketing materials for both state agencies and other partners- to help think beyond traditional partnerships and identify where there are shared goals.

Last year, BCC approved Southern Wings joining the World Resources Institute 20x20 Initiative, whose goal is to restore 20 million hectares of degraded land in Central and South America and the Caribbean by 2020. Southern Wings joined to bring a biodiversity message to this group and make sure restoration projects are appropriate to support biodiversity.

Discussion and Questions

-Are there discussions on whether states could use Blue Ribbon Panel funding to invest outside of state boundaries? Yes, there is language that indicates that money can be used wherever it is needed for Pittman-Robertson, and we believe this extends to BRP funding. Discussion: Partners in Flight can think about how it can be ready when the money comes to help with project prioritization (Ken Rosenberg). Since match is a challenge for states, we can become hemispheric or landscape-level to look at matching money from other sources, such as NGOs (Glenn Olson). Texas is one of these states- full funding for their SWG is \$64 million, and they will need help to identify best places to spend that, as well as identify match (Ross Melinchuk).

Pacific Flyway Shorebird Conservation Plan

Stan Senner, Vice President for Bird Conservation- Pacific Flyway, National Audubon Society

[View presentation online.](#) Download the powerpoint to see detailed presentation notes.

Last year, the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Business Plan was released, which inspired a Pacific group to produce a similar strategy, which will be available at www.shorebirdplan.org. Background for both plans: shorebird populations continue to lose ground due to continuation of ecosystems stresses, disturbance, and direct mortality. Many of these stresses are intensified by climate change. The Pacific approach is not a plan, but a strategy, which can be stepped down into a business plan. The Pacific collaboration is a bottom-up partnership with participation from 53 institutions across 15 countries. It focuses on the Pacific coasts of North, Central, and South America and is subdivided into four focal geographic regions (e.g., Arctic/Subarctic, North-Temperate, Neotropical, and South-Temperate) that share broad habitat characteristics and similar conservation challenges and opportunities. Strategy adheres to the Open Standards for Practice of Conservation and focuses on 21 target species which are representative of what is in the Flyway, with different migration patterns. Plan presents key strategies (see slide 12) and pairs each threat with potential strategies and actions to address. Note that linking shorebird conservation to human needs is one key to success.

2012 NAWMP Revision and 2018 Update Process

*Diane Eggeman, Director, Hunting and Game Management Division, FL Fish and Wildlife .
Conservation Commission
Dean Smith, NAWMP Director, AFWA*

[View presentation online.](#)

NAWMP is moving forward to implement its objectives, including taking objectives and stepping them down. Historically, NAWMP objectives have focused on bird populations and habitat, but now they also include objectives for people. Historically, there has also been debate on maps that were used and their creation, so NAWMP is developing a tool to query whether certain areas are in/out of the plan.

-NAWMP is exploring how to engage wildlife viewers and private landowners in conservation.
-NAWMP has asked for input from the bird community regarding what each organization has done as a result of the 2012 update, and what should happen next.
See slides 5 and 8 for timeline.

-Future of Waterfowl Management Workshop II, September 26-27, 2017 at National Conservation Training Center. Workshop Objective: advance implementation of 2012 Revision and seek input about critical adjustments for the 2018 update.

Additional Discussion, Closing Items

Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (PHJV) produced a [one-pager](#) to bring together 30 years of accomplishments. Some other habitat JVs in Canada are producing similar reports.