



TEN YEAR VISION

2012 – 2022



BIRDS

are not aware of political borders, but their challenges transcend these boundaries and so must our planning and initiatives on their behalf.



SOUTHERN WINGS PROGRAM

444 North Capitol Street, Suite 725 Washington, DC 20001
+001 202-624-8917 // +001 202-624-7891 (fax)
dhahn@fishwildlife.org // Skype: deb_hahn



Contents

4	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
6	INTRODUCTION	
8	VISION & MISSION	
8	Vision	
9	Mission	
12	BACKGROUND	28
14	TARGETS, GOALS, & OBJECTIVES	30
14	Targets	
16	Goals & Objectives	
20	LEADERSHIP & IMPLEMENTATION	31
22	EVALUATION AND MONITORING	32
		33
		APPENDIX I: Organizational chart for Southern Wings
		APPENDIX II: Southern Wings project locations from 2009 - 2012





Executive Summary

The state fish and wildlife agencies share migratory birds not only with each other but with other countries across the globe. *Partners in Flight Saving our Shared Birds* report acknowledges that almost half of the native landbirds (418 species) in North America rely on habitats in at least 2 of its 3 countries—United States, Canada, and Mexico (Berlanga et al. 2010). Eighty percent of all shorebirds breeding in United States, Canada, and Mexico are also shared among the three countries. Neotropical migrants travel hundreds and even thousands of miles between breeding and wintering grounds and depend on habitats throughout their entire journey. Their conservation cannot be accomplished in one park, one country, or in some cases, even on one continent. It depends on the collective partnership of conservationists across the Western Hemisphere. Birds are not aware of political borders, but their challenges transcend these boundaries and so must our planning and initiatives on their behalf.

Birds are also indicators of the health of our ecosystems. The 2009 *State of the Birds Report* (NABCI 2009) provided the first comprehensive, national look at how birds are faring across major biomes. The report identified concerns for many species. For example, there is high concern for coastal shorebirds because of dwindling food supplies and disturbance of their habitats. Dramatic declines in grassland birds highlight both the loss and degradation of one of our most endangered habitats. Grasslands are also our only tri-national terrestrial habitat in North America and require



cooperation among countries to conserve shared species.

Amidst all of this, birds are one of our most cherished resources. They are photographed, watched, hunted, fed, and enjoyed by millions of Americans. In 2006, there were over 48 million birdwatchers or birders in the U.S. Birders spent an estimated \$12 billion on trip expenditures and \$24 billion on equipment expenditures and generated over \$82 billion in total industry output (Carver 2009).

To sustain healthy bird populations into the future, state wildlife agencies and their partners spend substantial amounts of money managing habitat, monitoring species status, conserving habitat, and educating the public. However, they recognize that, as a shared resource, their investments within our borders are not enough. To protect the tremendous conservation actions within their states, state wildlife agencies can work through the Southern Wings Program, one mechanism to build partnerships and support ongoing bird conservation projects in Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Southern Wings seeks to work with our conservation colleagues in these regions and support their efforts to benefit the conservation of migratory birds linked to the individual states. Our partners are equally passionate, dedicated, and knowledgeable about the needs for conservation of our shared migratory birds.

Since 2009, the Southern Wings Program has been the mechanism to help facilitate state wildlife agency involvement in these projects. In the first 2 years, state agencies and their U.S. partners have contributed over \$250,000 that was then matched before contributing to an on-the-ground project. Projects with Mexican and Colombian partners have helped state fish and wildlife agencies support the management of grasslands in Saltillo, tropical woodlands in the Yucatan Peninsula, and wetlands in the Colorado River Delta in Mexico; the conservation of Andean forest in Colombia and priority habitats in Nicaragua and much more. All of these projects are in critical areas for priority migratory bird species such as Cerulean Warblers, Golden-winged Warblers, and Long-billed Curlews.

This document provides the vision to move the Southern Wings Program forward over the next 10 years. The goals are as follows.



- I. Fifty states contribute resources to, and participate in, the Southern Wings Program.
- II. By 2022, \$2 million is invested annually by states in Southern Wings projects.
- III. By 2022, sixty state agency priority migratory bird species have benefited from Southern Wings projects through land conservation and acquisition, management to improve habitat, outreach to private landowners and cooperators, and government and landowner support for conservation of important habitats.
- IV. By 2022, twenty-five formal partnerships between state wildlife agencies and Mexico, Central America, South America and Caribbean partners are established and support successful implementation of Southern Wings Program projects.
- V. By 2022, twenty-four project areas have been or are being supported by the Southern Wings Program.
- VI. By 2022, communication and information exchange is occurring among participating state wildlife agencies and between agencies and Mexico, Central America, South America and Caribbean partners.

The goals have associated objectives that are also measurable and achievable. The Southern Wings Leadership Team will define specific strategies to achieve the goals and objectives over the short and long term. The state agencies involved in the Southern Wings Program, the Bird Conservation Committee, and the Southern Wings Program's Leadership and Technical Committees will employ this collective vision to reach out to other state wildlife agencies and partners that want to participate in the conservation of our shared migratory bird resource.



Introduction

Neotropical migratory birds face unprecedented threats. Greatest among them is habitat loss. To protect in-state conservation investments for migrant birds, conservation actions should be implemented across their full annual cycle. Southern Wings facilitates the use of state fish and wildlife agency contributions from Mexico and the Caribbean to the southern cone of South America. Southern Wings and its non-governmental organization partners help to focus vital conservation activities on winter refuge sites for more than one-half of North America's breeding birds; such sites include forests, wetlands, and grasslands that face continually mounting pressures. The anticipated loss of remaining habitats due to expected human population increases over the next 40 years casts an air of uncertainty over the future of all wild places and species dependent on them, including neotropical migratory birds. Populations of migrants are much more concentrated on the winter grounds, making threats to nonbreeding grounds of high concern since they can have a disproportional impact on a species and making conservation to protect or improve nonbreeding habitat good investments. Habitat conservation and management throughout the full annual cycle of birds, and especially the state's priority species is a prerequisite to ensuring our in-state conservation efforts are protected.

It is not sufficient to focus limited resources solely on breeding ground issues in the United States. Conservation actions to stem the widespread decline of birds with far flung geographies require a hemispheric approach. As state wildlife agencies, we must scale up bird conservation initiatives through the implementation of strategies that span continents. The Southern Wings Program (Southern Wings) is designed to do just that.



Born of need and rooted in the recognition that wintering ground conservation is an essential component of the ever evolving bird conservation paradigm, Southern Wings provides a vehicle to conduct full annual-cycle conservation action for our priority bird species (e.g., Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified in the State Wildlife Action Plans) through conservation action in stopover and wintering sites. Modeled after the state involvement in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and North American Wetlands Conservation Act in Canada, Southern Wings sets the stage for international collaboration through establishment of a program that facilitates state fish and wildlife agencies' ability to work directly with colleagues beyond our state and national borders to generate benefits to state priority species. By advancing protection and management of wintering ground habitat critical to the long-term survival of our shared migratory bird heritage, Southern Wings heralds a new era of bird conservation for many state wildlife agencies and protects our state-level investment in bird conservation.

An evolving program, Southern Wings requires a vision that provides future direction; guides the work of the coordinator, the Leadership Committee, and the Technical Committee; clarifies the niche the Southern Wings fills amidst other international bird conservation efforts; and provides specific guidance to advance the Southern Wings. This Strategic Vision document meets these purposes. The document builds on the successes of Southern Wings' first 2 years and leads the program into the future. It also builds on the basic principles that migratory birds are a shared resource and that conservation of migratory birds requires conservation built on sound science throughout their full annual cycle.



Mission & Vision

Vision

Healthy and sustainable populations of migratory birds throughout the Western Hemisphere that are enjoyed for generations to come.

Mission

Encourage and facilitate state fish and wildlife agency participation in conservation projects for shared priority birds in Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean.





Background

Stemming from a September 2005 presentation by the Missouri Department of Conservation at the Partners in Flight (PIF) Implementation Committee meeting, the idea of a mechanism to support state participation in conservation in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean was born. At the September 2007 Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) meeting, the Southern Wings Task Force (Task Force) was created and given the specific charge *“to create a funding mechanism that provides an easy and flexible avenue for states willing to participate in conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean by contributing funds annually through a U.S.-based third party that will handle the funds and coordinate the distribution of funds.”*

The Task Force presented an interim report including recommendations to the Partners in Flight/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group and then to AFWA’s Bird Conservation Committee in March 2008. The report framed the preliminary guidance for Southern Wings, characterized the opportunities and challenges associated with Southern Wings implementation and identified four implementation alternatives.

The guidance stated that a mechanism should be 1) based solidly on the biological connection that exists between migratory birds that occur in the states and also spend part of their annual cycle in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, 2) allow for relatively easy and seamless financial participation by interested states, 3) report to those states on progress and accomplishments, and 4) achieve the benefits of match and leverage of state funds.



During report preparation, the Chair of the Bird Conservation Committee queried states via letter regarding their interest in Southern Wings participation. Of the 21 states that responded, 18 indicated willingness to participate, including 6 who stated current funding levels preclude immediate participation. The responses also indicated most states were comfortable pooling money for regional projects; all states would require some type of reporting on project accomplishments; and that overhead charges should be below 20%. Additionally, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies offered to invoice, collect, hold, and disseminate funds for participating member states. In general, the responses indicated broad support for Southern Wings development.

Recognizing that internationally-supported waterfowl conservation efforts in Canada began with only 3 participating states, the Task Force recommended the development of the Southern Wings Program. In 2009, the Southern Wings Program was officially endorsed by AFWA and began accepting voluntary contributions.

As is so well demonstrated by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), sound science is needed to put good conservation on the ground especially for migratory birds that require action at breeding, stopover, and wintering sites. PIF, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and Waterbirds Conservation for the Americas continue to improve the science behind migratory bird conservation across the Western Hemisphere. PIF was instrumental in developing the foundation for states' linkages to their partners to the south. PIF created maps depicting the linkages between states and wintering grounds for migratory birds important to individual states; they developed the tri-national assessment and corresponding report; and they facilitated numerous discussions on the importance of international conservation efforts. The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group, and the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network support and encourage research to further our knowledge of critical areas for the conservation of shorebirds. The Waterbirds for the Americas partnered with Birdlife International to identify important waterbird sites in Central and South America. In addition, monitoring stations and bird banding data continue to improve our knowledge throughout the annual cycle of bird migration. The wealth of information available allows Southern Wings to identify projects that support state agencies' priority migratory bird species.

Throughout the development of Southern Wings, non-governmental and federal partners provided insight and support and facilitated development of Southern Wings. Southern Wings requires support to move funds to partners and to provide the accountability needed for the states to send money to out-of state partners. State wildlife agencies can move money directly to a partner in Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean; through a State Regional Association; or through a third party organization. The third party non-governmental organization (NGO) contracts with the partners, ensures that projects are advancing, keeps track of budgets and match, and provides reporting twice a year to allow states to know where and how their funds are spent. In the inaugural year of the Program (2009-2010), seven states contributed more than \$75,000. In the second Year (2010-2011), 10 individual states and the 13 states of the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) contributed \$128,500 and raised an additional \$48,400 from partners. To date, 11 states and their partners have already recommitted over \$187,000 for 2011-2012 (see Figure 1).

State wildlife agencies decide what projects they will support and have complete control of the amount of money that they contribute to the Southern Wings. In the first 3 years, states annually contributed between \$1,000 and \$30,000. The Southern Wings ensures that all state funds receive at least a 1:1 match and ideally more. The ability to provide such a match comes both from our NGO partners and from partnering with the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Neotrop Act). A majority of Southern Wings projects to date have a connection to the Neotrop Act, which has a 3:1 match requirement.

Southern Wings is one of many efforts working internationally to conserve birds. Others include, but are not limited to, the Neotrop Act, U.S. Forest Service International Programs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Division of Migratory Birds, USFWS International Conservation, National Audubon's International Alliances Program, The Nature Conservancy, and several Bird Habitat Joint Ventures. The number of engaged programs is an indication of the demand for the international conservation cooperation necessary to adequately conserve migratory birds. Another indication is the level of funding requests received by the many programs. In the first 10 years of the Neotrop Act, the average annual funding request was \$12,730,000. The Southern Wings fills a unique niche by facilitating state wildlife agency's direct participation in neotropical migratory bird conservation on critical wintering habitat. This allows for conservation action on state agencies Species of Greatest Conservation Need during times and in locations that might otherwise be considered out of the scope of the state wildlife agencies. Southern Wings also allows state wildlife agencies to match the dollars they contribute and pool their funds with other state wildlife agencies where appropriate. Considerable actions and expenditures on



breeding ground may be ineffective without supporting conservation action on winter grounds. Even relatively small amounts of money can go a long way and target especially critical needs for the species in most need of assistance.

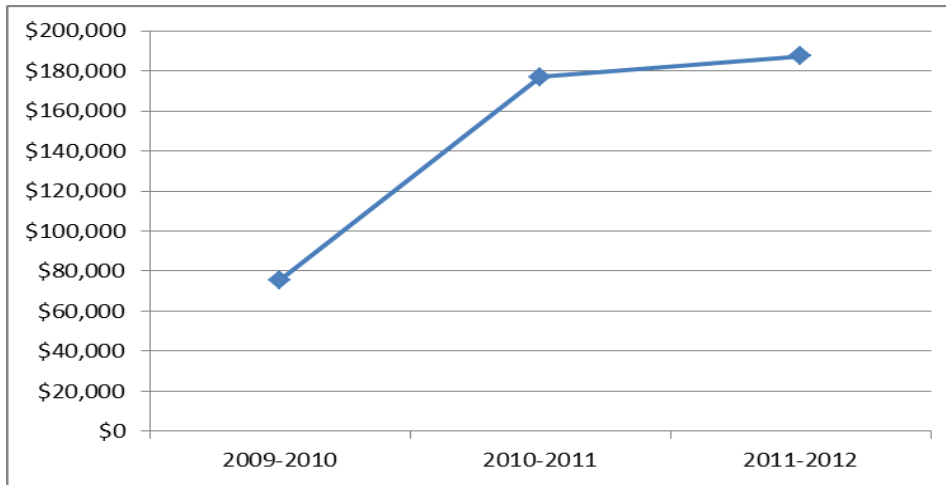


Figure 1: Contributions to the Southern Wings Program as of August 2011 (note that year 3 funds are continuing to be collected)

Targets, Goals, & Objectives

Targets

Targets represent the overall desired condition that the Southern Wings seeks to achieve.

- T1. Sustainable populations of migratory birds
- T2. Fifty states participating in the Southern Wings Program
- T3. Annually increasing contributions to support critical projects facilitated through the Southern Wings Program
- T4. Southern Wings Program support to critical projects.
- T5. Enhanced relationships between state wildlife agencies and Mexico, Central America, South America and Caribbean partners
- T6. States and project partners support annual-life cycle conservation of shared species

Goals & Objectives

The goals lay out our long-term plan. Each goal is 1) linked to targets, 2) impact oriented, 3) measurable, and 4) time limited (generally >10 years). The objectives are 1) results oriented, 2) measurable, 3) time limited (generally 3-10 years), 4) specific, and 5) practical. Each objective defines in specific terms what the Southern Wings Program hopes to achieve for its intermediate results on the way to achieving one or more goals. The Southern Wings Leadership and Technical Committees will develop the specific strategies necessary to implement the goals and objectives that will then define an annual work plan.

GOAL	OBJECTIVE
Goal 1: (T2, T3) Fifty States contribute resources to and participate in the Southern Wings Program.	Objective 1.1: (G1) By 2017, 35 States are consistently contributing resources to the Southern Wings Program.
Goal 2: (T3) By 2022, \$2 million is invested	Objective 2.1: (G2) By 2017, \$400,000 is



GOAL	OBJECTIVE
<p>annually by states in Southern Wings projects.</p>	<p>invested annually in Southern Wings projects by states.</p>
<p>Goal 3: (T1, T6) By 2022, sixty state agency priority migratory bird species have benefited from Southern Wings projects through land conservation and acquisition, management to improve habitat, outreach to private landowners and cooperators, and government and landowner support for conservation of important habitats.</p>	<p>Objective 3.1: (G3) By 2017, thirty migratory birds of priority to the states have benefitted from Southern Wings projects.</p>
<p>Goal 4: (T5, T6) By 2022, twenty-five formal partnerships between state wildlife agencies and Mexico, Central America, South America and Caribbean partners are established and support successful implementation of Southern Wings Program projects.</p>	<p>Objective 4.1: By 2017, twelve States will have initiated formal partnerships with partners at the project level; conduct onsite visits and discuss how to enhance the partnership.</p>
<p>Goal 5: (T4) By 2022, twenty-four project areas have been or are being supported by the Southern Wings Program.</p>	<p>Objective 4.1/5.1: (G4, G5) By 2017, for the thirty birds identified in Objective 3.1, all have Southern Wings projects on the ground addressing critical species conservation needs.</p>
<p>Goal 6: (T5) By 2022, communication and information exchange is occurring among participating state wildlife agencies and between agencies and Mexico, Central America, South America and Caribbean partners.</p>	<p>Objective 6.1: (G6) By 2017 establish forums and mechanisms to increase communication, exchange of information and sharing of experiences amongst participating state wildlife agencies and between participating state wildlife agencies and on the ground project partners.</p>



Leadership & Implementation

The AFWA's Bird Conservation Committee provides a home for the Southern Wings. The Bird Conservation Committee identified a Leadership Committee to provide day to day leadership and address specific issues as they arise. The Leadership Committee is chaired by a state wildlife agency that is the lead on the development and implementation of Southern Wings. The membership of the Committee includes state wildlife agency members, NGO members, and Federal agency members that can help support and guide the program. Each year a Technical Committee will be established to review and recommend projects. The Southern Wings Technical Committee will participate on behalf of the states in formulating recommendations for projects in which to invest state funds. To ensure delivery, no investment recommendation will be made without the mutual endorsement of the Technical Committee, the state agency that provided the funds, and the partner NGO. They will agree on a schedule by which the NGO will invoice Regional Associations or individual states on the basis of existing contracts between the NGO and the regions and/or states. The Technical Committee and the NGO will agree on a schedule of reporting on project status that will be reflected in subcontracts between the NGO and project partners. The Technical Committee will receive the reports and distribute them to the Regional Associations and state agencies involved in the particular project. All project reports will be available for states potentially interested in contributing to the project. The Technical Committee will be available to provide oral reports at each meeting of the Bird Conservation Committee.

Every state agency that contributes to the Southern Wings Program has the option of appointing a representative to the Technical Committee. At a minimum, each Regional Association will have at least one state represented



on the Technical Committee. Additional Technical Committee members may include partners such as the ABC, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), National Audubon Society (NAS), the USFWS, and others. These additional members will not be voting members of the Technical Committee but will participate in an advisory capacity. The Southern Wings Coordinator will provide support to all the Committees and the Southern Wings in general.



Monitoring & Evaluation

As with any conservation program, evaluation and monitoring are critical components to its success. The Southern Wings has developed measurable and achievable goals and objectives that allow for relatively easy evaluation. Evaluating a conservation programs impact on species is a challenge. However, through requiring proposals to include a section on expected benefits to migratory birds and ensuring that final reports also discuss this impact will be one way the Southern Wings Program evaluates success. The strategies being developed in partnership with this document will also be measurable and achievable within a specific amount of time. As we achieve our strategies it will bring us closer to achieving our objectives and also our goals. Using an annual work plan, the Leadership Committee with assistance from the Coordinator will review and report progress toward objectives. Every 3 years, they will also review and report progress on achieving the objectives and goals.





Program Operations

The following information outlines the operations of the Southern Wings.

- a. States voluntarily enter into agreements with and contribute funds through a Regional Association, a third party NGO, or directly with a project partner in Mexico, Central America, South America or the Caribbean. The Regional Associations and third party NGO may charge a reasonable overhead (less than 10%) for handling and facilitating the transfer of monies. Those entities collect, hold and disseminate funds for approved projects. Facilitating entities provide a clear and transparent routing process and rigorous annual reporting.
- b. Each year the Southern Wings Technical Committee, consisting of representatives from participating states, reviews and recommends projects. Recommended projects can be either new or ongoing. Each state wildlife agency determines at its own discretion the amount of funds it would like to contribute. State agencies have final approval over project selection and the Regional Associations approve the transfer of those funds moved through the Regional Association. Southern Wings relies on Regional Associations that collect funds for Southern Wings to approve the transfer of funds after a state agency has approved the project.
- c. At least a 1:1 match of state funds is required and higher levels of match are encouraged. Project partners in Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean can use in-kind contributions as match when appropriate.



- d. The Regional Association, state agency, or third party NGO transfers funds to the in-country partner, usually an NGO, for on-the-ground project implementation. The Regional Association or a third party NGO is responsible for overseeing project implementation, administering funds, and providing annual accomplishment reports.
- e. The Southern Wings Leadership Committee, under the auspices of the Bird Conservation Committee, provides annual leadership to the Southern Wings and addresses specific issues as they arise.



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ACRONYMS

ABC – American Bird Conservancy

AFWA – Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

BCC – Bird Conservation Committee of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

NAS – National Audubon Society

NAWMP – North American Waterfowl Management Plan

NEAFWA – Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

NGO – Nongovernmental Organizations

PIF – Partners in Flight

TNC – The Nature Conservancy

USFS – United States Forest Service

USFWS – United States Fish and Wildlife Service

PHOTO CREDITS

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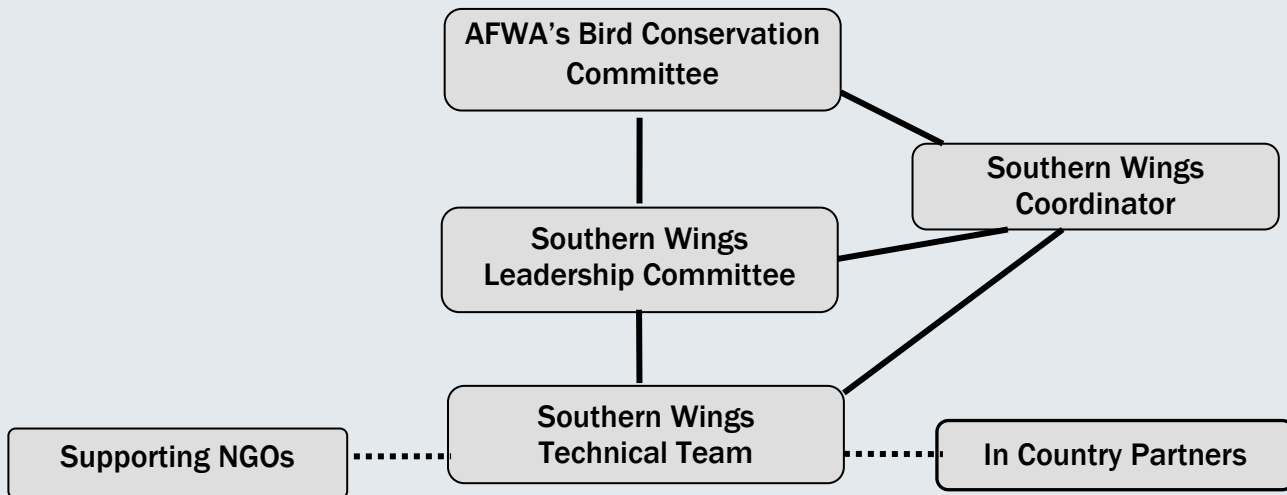
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Back Page - Red Knots by Greg Breese, USFWS

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Appendix I

Organizational Chart for Southern Wings





Appendix II

Southern Wings Project Locations from 2009 -2012





444 North Capitol Street, Suite 725
Washington, DC 20001
+001 202-624-8917
+001 202-624-7891 (fax)
www.fishwildlife.org/wings
dhahn@fishwildlife.org
Skype: deb_hahn