

BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE'S GRASSLANDS WORKING GROUP

87th North American Fish and Wildlife Conference Virtual Meeting

Chair: Bill White, Missouri Department of Conservation

Vice-Chair: Greg Link, North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Thursday, March 10, 2022

MEETING MINUTES

The Grassland Work Group met at 7:00 PT on March 10, 2022. Bill White, work group chair called the meeting to order, welcoming the work group members and other meeting participants, and providing a run-down of the meeting agenda.

The first item on the agenda was a presentation from Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director of the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, providing highlights and updates on the on-going Central Flyway Grassland Roadmap effort. The Central Flyway Grassland Roadmap is a tri-national strategic and collaborative effort pulling together eight sectors of our society to collectively work towards improving the resiliency and sustainability of our grasslands and communities in the Central Flyway geography. The effort was one of two grassland conservation summits initiated by this work group in 2019 with funding provided by a AFWA MultiState Conservation Grant (MSCG). Some of the highlights provided in Tammy's update were the findings from a recent Landowner Survey, progress within each of the strategic buckets, monitoring measures identified for key bird species within the focus area, awareness products and forums developed by their Communications Team, a multi-metric monitoring tool known as the Grassland Scorecard, activities for Leadership Engagement, as well as the upcoming 2nd Grassland Roadmap Summit (May 24-25) in Ft. Collins, CO. See <https://www.grasslandsroadmap.org/> for more information and background.

As an example of a state stepdown of this larger landscape effort, Greg Link, Chief of Conservation and Communications Division for North Dakota Game and Fish Department, gave an overview of North Dakota's recently launched Meadowlark Initiative. This Initiative is a strategic, landscape-level coalition lead by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, tapping into the collective insights, resources, and efforts of conservation, agriculture and industry partners to enhance, restore and sustain native grasslands in North Dakota. The Meadowlark Initiative focuses on five elements of the native grassland conservation: rancher support; diverse grassland reconstruction; consultation with industry to avoid, minimize, and offset impacts to native prairie; promotion and awareness of societal benefits; and the expansion on science and education. As a means to jumpstart the effort, contributions from 13 core partners were leveraged to obtain an NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant for \$7.1 million to fund and deliver a broad range of rancher assistance and grassland conservation programs. See <https://gf.nd.gov/meadowlark-initiative> for more information and background on the Initiative.

Jim Giocomo, Central Regional Director for American Bird Conservancy (ABC), provided an overview and update of the two other important work group assignments, in addition to the Central Grassland Roadmap Summit, which the work group accomplished with the 2019 AFWA MSCG funding. The first being the Mississippi Flyway Grassland Summit and the second, the state-by-state program assessment/GAP analysis of grassland conservation efforts. The Mississippi Flyway Grassland Summit, the eastern regional grassland conservation summit, was held January 2021 and lead by Jane Fitzgerald, American Bird Conservancy, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture. The Mississippi Flyway Grassland Summit

deals with a landscape much different than that of the Central Flyway, more populated area with less unbroken grassland. This roadmap isn't intended to replace other efforts targeted to the conservation of grassland Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), but rather to provide an overview of conservation needs across taxa and spatial scales. Information about the Mississippi Flyway Grasslands Roadmap Summit can be found at: <http://www.msflywaygrasslandssummit.com/>

The GAP analysis survey was contracted out to Dr. Amanda Haverland, ABC. Results of that effort can be at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3fd96b83f9f5496fbbe72c57ead536c5>

Jim also provided an update on the progress of the North American Grassland Conservation Act, proposed legislation to enact a program modeled after the highly successful North American Wetlands Conservation Act to protect and restore native grassland. The Legislation will probably be introduced in Congress this spring (see <https://actforgrasslands.org/> for more information).

Bill White informed the work group he is retiring and wrapping up his career with Missouri Department of Conservation; therefore, we need a to find a new chair or co-chair for the work group. If any state representative is interested in stepping into this role, they should contact Greg Link at glink@nd.gov.

In order to fund and continue the important work initiated with the two strategic grassland summits, the work group intends to pursue another AFWA MSCG. Greg Link provided an overview on how the MSCG process has changed since 2018. AFWA currently has identified a set of strategic priorities, rather than using selected National Conservation Needs (NCN) to award and direct grants through their MSCG. Greg will set up a meeting with Silvana Yarochuk, AFWA Multistate Conservation Grants Program Manager, and interested work group members to discuss and better understand the application process.

Ted Koch, North American Grouse Partnership, is coordinating with NRCS, USFWS, and state fish and wildlife agencies to determine how, collectively, we can do a better job (focused, effective, and strategic) developing, implementing, and delivering conservation on private land.

Action Items:

- Update and approval of a Grassland Resolution by AFWA directors. If not new action or changes are being proposed, the previous resolution is still in play.
- The new work chair or co-chair should be on the NABCI board
- Seeking at least three state directors to participate in the upcoming Central Grassland Roadmap Summit in May.
- Folks in the Atlantic Flyway are asking about a grassland summit for their respective geography. Jim Giocomo and ABC are willing to assist **based upon experiences in the Central grassland and the Mississippi Flyway region**, but another entity or entities need to step up as the project leader(s).
- Not much interest is coming from the Pacific Flyway in terms of a strategic summit, but Susana Mateos, AFWA Bird Conservation Manager, and Angie Reseland, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Farm Bill Coordinator, expressed willingness to seek out and identify potential partner interest in that flyway area.

The meeting was adjourn 8:45 PT.