Bird Conservation Committee Grassland Working Group Meeting Minutes

September 12, 2017

AFWA annual Meeting,

Snowbird Resort, UT

Meeting was Opened by Working Group Chair Bill White at 2:15 PM. Those in attendance included: Greg Link, Co-Chair, Judith Scarl, Alicia Hardin, Geoff Walsh, Healy Hamilton, Anne Gage, John Morgan, Kathyrn Folkl, Emily Jo Williams, Bill Van Pelt, Tony Leif, Monica Tomosy, Jon Haufler, Don McKenzie, Scott taylor, Dave Kosteusly, Todd bogenshutz, Mitch Marcus, San stiver, Daren riedle, Conor Marshall, Tammy VerCauteren

Bill provided highlights of the May 5 teleconference call of the Working Group:

* Alicia Hardin, chair of the resolution team, shared a draft of the resolution, edits were suggested and Alicia’s team will finalize and submit the final version in early July.
* Jim Giocomo, chair of the assessment team, shared continued concerns about the assessment. Staffing capacity is not sufficient to synthesize data gathered from the assessment especially if it includes a GIS component. Jim’s team is still looking for edits to the draft template, but most of the comments coming from the working group and the North American deal with how to conduct the assessment. We are still unsure at how fine a scale we need to do the assessment at to fit the intent of the BCC.
* The funding source team is being activated and Geoff Walsh agreed to lead the team.

Anne Gage with the World Wildlife Fund provided an overview of Plowprint 2016 which will be released to the public in October. Highlights of her presentation include:

-50% of Great Plains grasslands still intact with an annual loss of 0.69%

-2.5 million acres were converted in 2016, down from 3.7 million in 2015.

-50% of the plowprint is in perennial cover which could be CRP or non-native pasture plantings

-60% of the Northern Great Plains subset is on poor to moderate soils

Information presented may be helpful in the revision of our NCN proposal and the resolution if it does not get passed later this week.

Jon Haufler with the Interstate Working Group gave an overview of the Interstate Working Group expansion for greater prairie chicken and sharp-tailed grouse. They are seeking partners and supporting initiatives/funding in an effort to coordinate delivery and stack programs. A handout is appended to these minutes.

**Task Team Reports**

Grassland Conservation Resolution Team – Alicia Hardin distributed the resolution developed and submitted to the AFWA Resolutions Committee for consideration this week. Bill will inform the work group next week of the outcome of the resolution’s consideration by AFWA.

NCN Proposal Team – Greg Link reported that the NCN had been developed and submitted by the February deadline for consideration at the 2017 North American. It was submitted by the Bird Conservation Committee and endorsed by MAFWA. While it was not selected at the North Amercian, Greg’s team will resubmit the proposal by the February 2018 deadline so that it can be considered at the 2018 North American.

Evaluation/Assessment of grassland bird activities Team – Bill reported on behalf of Team Chair Jim Giocomo that the draft of the template will be piloted by the Mississippi Flyway Council Nongame Bird Technical Section because of their desire to conduct a similar assessment within the Flyway.

Funding Source Team – Geoff Walsh reported that the team has had preliminary discussions, but need to use the results of the assessment to build a better case for funding efforts.

**Workgroup Work Plan**

Bill handed out a draft version of the workgroup’s work plan for the coming year. He asked for comments from the group. Plans are to send out to the entire workgroup and get final approval from team chairs once the work plan is ready for submitting to the BCC.

EJ Williams suggested ramping up communication about the workgroup efforts, needs and issues both externally and internally. Bill will add a communication piece to the work plan.

**Other business**

Healy Hamilton, Natureserve, discussed the N.A. Wilderness and Protected Areas Committee (NAWPA) comprised of Director of Parks, Mexico, the Director of Parks, Canada and the Directors of USFWS, BLM, NPS, USFS.

They will host two webinars next week to share a Natureserve analysis of N.A. temperate grasslands it is a coarse analysis that will discuss threats and condition of what remains. Bill will share the working group listserv and Healy will email out a flyer that announces the webinars. The analysis may be of use in our evaluation and recommendations for future actions. There will be a manuscript released and a website.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 PM.

**Interstate Working Groups for Greater Prairie-chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse**

Grasslands,particularly in the Great Plains,are in jeopardy as indicated by continuing declines

in many species of grassland-associated birds and other wildlife species. Numerous efforts have been initiated to address losses in grasslands and declines in grassland species.

In 2015, the Directors from 14 states, organized through WAFWA and MAFWA,authorized the establishment of interstate working groups (JWG's) for greater prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse. The goal of the IWG's is to expand and coordinate grassland conservation efforts using GPC and STG as flagship species. The long-term goal is to develop large blocks of native grasslands in sufficient sizes,arrangements,and quality to support populations of these 2

species which will also support populations of a large number of additional grassland­

associated species.

Why should these IWG's be important to the Grassland Bird Working Group and other grassland conservation efforts?

Despite the numerous initiatives for grassland conservation,declines in amounts and quality of grasslands continue and populations of grassland-associated species continue to decline. Reasons for this include:

• Too little overall funding to support large scale conservation efforts,

• Lack of coordination and focus resulting in "random acts of conservation" producing small and fragmented conservation efforts,and

• Inability to engage large clusters of landowners needed to produce large blocks of habitat, largely due to inadequate payments available to landowners.

Solutions include:

• Delineating a system of grassland core areas that are small enough to individually and in total be supported with potential conservation funding,

• Coordinating and concentrating delivery of conservation into these core areas,and

• Offering landowners higher payments within core areas for long-term grassland conservation so that high percentages find it economically advantageous to engage,

The IWG's are working to identify a system of core grassland areas of sufficient individual size, number of areas,and with consideration of linkage to support greater prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse, and through this provide for other associated species. Until we can coordinate efforts for grassland easements, provide full compensation payments for grazing practices favorable for the most sensitive species,incorporate payments for appropriate prescribed fire,and minimize impacts of detrimental energy and other developments in a system of core areas, we are likely to see continued risks to grassland species. The IWG's can help to coalesce better coordination of all grassland conservation initiatives towards a common course of action. Opportunities for engagement with the IWG's are forthcoming.