



Partners in Flight/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group
Chair: Sara Schweitzer, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Vice-Chair: Eric Gardner, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

107th AFWA Annual Meeting
Snowbird Resort, Sandy, Utah

Monday, September 11, 2017
3:00 – 5:00 p.m., Maybird Meeting Room

*The PIF/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group is 1 of 4 Working Groups of the Bird Conservation Committee of AFWA. This WG **serves as a forum for discussion** of initiative-related issues among representatives of State, Territorial, and Provincial fish and wildlife agencies, and other Association organizations. The WG may advance issues to the BCC from which information and requests can be presented to state directors.*

3:20 PM Welcome/Introductions/Review Agenda

Sara Schweitzer, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Eric Gardner, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

3:30 PM Goal 1: Bird Conservation Plan Partnerships – integrate outcomes of initiatives

- **Partnerships furthering avian conservation – private and public lands**
 - State of the Birds Report – 2017 Farm Bill (Geoff Geupel, Chair PIF SC, Point Blue)
 - See handout (same as from BCCI) – good for outreach; including legislative. There is a strong need to ensure Farm Bill is fully funded / reauthorized next year due to many of its conservation practices benefiting birds.
 - There is a planned **briefing and reception in DC to highlight the value of the Farm Bill to bird species and their habitats (Oct 4; 3-7 pm [EST])**. Prominent speakers from the bird conservation community will speak in support of the Farm Bill (see also PPT presented during BCCI).
 - The National Quail Initiative is promoting the Farm Bill reauthorization as well, especially a “natives first” initiative with NRCS (native plants as first option), and a short duration CRP Program (5-year contracts rather than the 10-year traditional contracts).
 - Grassland Birds WG (Alicia Hardin, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission)
 - Working on developing an NCN as precursor to drafting a multi-state grant. First NCN was not selected but the WG will try again.
 - The WG will report on their progress at BCCII.
 - The WG has developed a resolution that uses info from last year’s bird report and this resolution will be put forward at this AFWA meeting (see attachment).
 - WHSRN – U.S. Committee (Sara Schweitzer, USSCP Council Member)
 - New Chair, Rob Penner, TNC, Kansas
 - Engaging WHSRN sites with shorebird management strategies; Council reviewed 2 new sites for approval; likely will be 3 new sites approved in 2017 (WA, KS, GA)
 - Double-crested Cormorant pop. mgt. – federal & state coordination (Laurel Barnhill, USFWS)
 - Development of a framework for management of conflict species [See PPT slides (attached)]

- A 2-pronged approach: (1) Coordinating with Wildlife Services to draft a portion of an EA (to address court order due to inadequate EA); (2) address concerns to free-swimming fish. Will rely on Flyway Councils for input during the development process.
- There is a desire to move from a framework that monitors individual state efforts to one that is coordinated at a flyway level that supports conflict management.
- Melding biological goals for birds with goals for human well-being (Hemispheric vision of NABCI) (discussion led by Sara Schweitzer and E.J. Williams)
 - An approach that includes human dimensions and needs (see handout on Human Dimensions);
 - Our mgt. of avian populations and habitats are in concert with human well-being needs (water and air quality, etc.);
 - NABCI has some good examples – some obvious, some are newer connections;
 - An approach that provides explanation of the greater relevance of the work we do for avian species and habitats such that those from different disciplines will have greater appreciation and understanding of our work; and conversely, we will have greater appreciation of the benefits our work provides to human populations.
- **Projects underway – accomplishments**
 - Multi-state Desert Thrasher WG (Geoff Geupel, Chair PIF SC, Point Blue [see attached PIF Action Brief, p. 2]; Geoff Walsh, BLM [discussion])
 - Significant support from BLM with goal of preventing listing;
 - A collaborative project among federal agencies, NGOs, and 6 state fish and game agencies;
 - Current goals include:
 - Implementation of second year of data collection to determine current distribution, habitat use, and management recommendations.
 - Develop current and future distribution models for at risk species
 - Use of the Avian Knowledge Network (AKN) to coordinate standardized field protocols, data collection, security and management and interpretation across states
 - Multi-state Short-eared Owl project (discussed by Eric Gardner; notes [attached] from John Alexander)
 - A 9-state collaborative project, across range the range of the species;
 - Will identify impacts of various grazing practices on occupancy rates by Short-eared Owl through direct manipulation on the landscape;
 - Will quantify Short-eared Owl population size in each participating state to enable SWAP managers to assess and refine conservation priorities, threats, and actions;
 - Will quantify how Short-eared Owl populations fluctuate spatially and temporally at state and flyway scales so land and wildlife managers can contextualize local changes within the broader regional variation;
 - Will identify distribution, habitat use, grazing, and climate influences on Short-eared Owls so SWAP managers can target and prioritize specific open-land landscapes to retain important areas and connect disjunct landscapes;
 - Will generate statistically-rigorous, region-wide projections of Short-eared Owl viability based upon ensemble climate models to focus management actions for maximum conservation return for owls and other open-land species;
 - Implement high-value conservation actions prioritized by future population projections focused on most at risk populations and core populations of Short-eared Owls by engaging Flyway Councils, AFWA committees, state personnel, and other agencies to facilitate science delivery that effectively links results to priority state conservation opportunities.
 - Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative & Pacific Americas Shorebird Conservation Strategy (Sara Schweitzer, USSCP Council Member)
 - Several multi-state projects are underway within the AFSI – e.g., (1) a predator management project that will result in BMPs for those managing shorebirds and have problems with predation during the breeding season (contact: Dr. A. Dayer, VaTechU), and demonstration

projects along the Atlantic Flyway (e.g., Masonboro Island, NC); (2) Human Disturbance project; (3) outreach/communication project.

- The Pacific Americas Shorebird Conservation Strategy leads are drafting RFPs for 2018

- **Meetings – WG workshops & scientific papers**

- Partners in Flight 6th International Conference with the Sociedad Mesoamericana para la Biología y la Conservación, San Jose, Costa Rica, Oct. 30 – Nov. 03, 2017 (Laurel Barnhill, Past-Chair PIF SC, USFWS)
 - Will explore many aspects of full annual cycle conservation, especially possible population bottlenecks in the nonbreeding season.
 - Partners will further develop international bird conservation biological priorities and work with partners to develop projects.
 - Anticipate a PIF publication;
 - Hoping for Southern Wings partnership projects to form from this meeting's work.
- 7th Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group meeting, Paracas, Peru, Nov. 10-14, 2017 (Sara Schweitzer, USSCP Council Member)
 - An opportunity for input into the Pacific Americas Shorebird Conservation Strategy projects;
 - Research on areas of data gaps to be presented.

4:00 PM Goal 2: Identify Threats

- **Feral & Free-ranging Cats WG: Summary** Sara Schweitzer (NCWRC), Colin Gillin (Oregon Dept. Fish & Wildlife)
 - Presented at BCCI;
 - Opportunity to ask questions, explore in greater detail;
 - Survey to agencies will be distributed in late September;
 - If want to be on conference calls or other efforts, provide email or contact Sara or Colin.
 - An Ask to BCCII will be an extension of time to complete tasks in 2018. (approved)

4:10 PM Goal 3: To evaluate alternative strategies for bird conservation action, come to agreement, and make recommendations to AFWA leadership

- **Data Management and Sharing: Summary of work on Actions**
 - Avian Conserv. Assess. Database (ACAD) – accomplishments (Laurel Barnhill, Past-Chair PIF SC, USFWS)
 - The PIF Species Assessment database (now the Avian Conservation Assessment Database or ACAD) now covers all bird species from Canada to Panama (Not just landbirds). A fantastic networking and training tool, PIF is now working with state biologists and Joint Ventures to update regional scores and applications of the ACAD tool. The tool benefits state agencies in their work to generate priority habitats that benefit multiple priority species.
 - ACAD contains habitat, geographical, and population assessment data to advance full annual cycle and population modeling, landscape conservation planning, and population estimation.
 - PIF and the ACAD rely heavily on the Breeding Bird Survey, among the most reliable and cost effective citizen science programs in the world. BBS information is fundamental to monitoring trends/assessing vulnerability for PIF Watch List species and for producing annual State of the Birds population indicators for major habitats.
 - PIF plans to send letter requesting full funding of the BBS program.
 - ACAD is available on PIF webpage.
 - Avian Knowl. Network (AKN) – used by multi-state projects (John Alexander [notes]; David Hanni, Tennessee [discussion])
 - The Short-eared Owl multi-state project is a good example of usefulness of pooling data among states. Concerns over state data sharing but there are some state-level controls that can be put into place.
 - This project will use Avian Knowledge Northwest (www.AvianKnowledgeNorthwest.net) and eBird Northwest (www.eBird.org/NW). It will:

- Design and maintain a project website that hosts program documents including datasheets, protocols, training materials, annual results, etc. to facilitate both natural resource manager and citizen scientist engagement;
 - Compile and make readily available existing Short-eared Owl data collected during pilot survey efforts (2015 - 2017);
 - Create and maintain a data entry system with quality controls for citizen scientists that concurrently captures and documents volunteer hours and mileage as match;
 - Provide data management and summary tools for state volunteer coordinators and overall program coordinators to track survey progress within each season, further verify data quality, account for and report volunteer effort, and generate regular progress reports and datasets for analysis;
 - Identify needs and develop targeted data-rich decision support tools that help natural resource managers implement Short-eared Owl conservation objectives; and
 - Permanently archive all survey data in a standardized format in a widely used and accessible database (Avian Knowledge Northwest)
- National nodes: working to get them all talking.
 - Bulk upload tool recently completed – will be demonstrations provided. Workshops at Flyway Meetings will be developed (one for Mississippi Flyway planned).

4:25 PM Further Discussion; review 2017 Work Plan; Items for read-out to BCC II
See edits on draft work plan.

4:50 PM Adjourn

STATE OF THE BIRDS

2017



The Farm Bill provides a crucial safety net, for America's farmers and ranchers ... and America's birds

For birds, the Farm Bill secures important habitat for more than 100 bird species and is America's largest source of funding for habitat conservation on private lands.

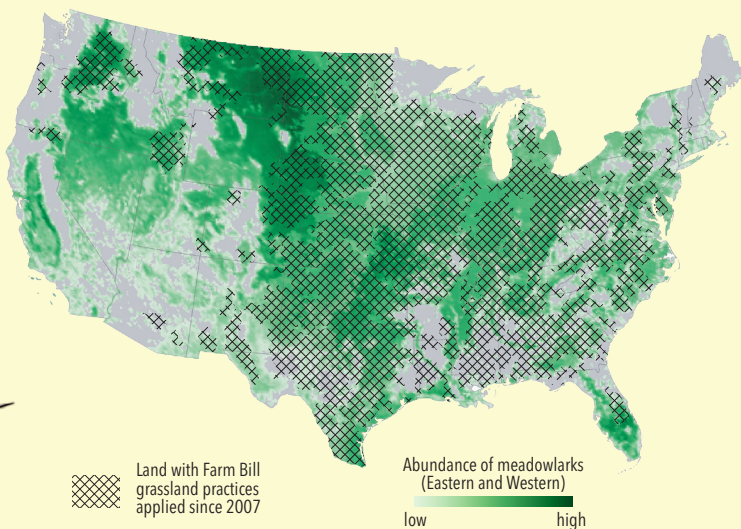
For landowners, Farm Bill conservation programs are part of the safety net for farmers, ranchers, and forest owners. It provides financial support for vital ecological services, such as clean water, and keeps working lands working.

"[The Farm Bill] helped us build a chemical and fertilizer containment facility... This is a good example of how ... Farm Bill dollars lead to improved water quality for everyone."

— FARMER DAVID WILLIAMS AT A FARM BILL FIELD HEARING IN FRANKENMUTH, MICHIGAN



Meadowlarks and the Farm Bill



Declining grassland birds, such as Eastern and Western Meadowlark, rely on habitat provided by Farm Bill conservation programs. Private lands support 97% of the breeding range of Eastern Meadowlarks, and 73% of the range of Western Meadowlarks.

TOP: WESTERN MEADOWLARK ON HAY BALE © TODD KLASSY, **LEFT:** WESTERN MEADOWLARK BY DONALD METZNER, **ABOVE:** MAP OF EASTERN AND WESTERN MEADOWLARK ABUNDANCE FROM eBIRD DATA, AND FARM BILL CONSERVATION PRACTICES FROM USDA-NRCS DATA.

THE FARM BILL IS AMERICA'S HARDEST WORKING LEGISLATION FOR BIRDS, FARMERS, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Keeps birds off the Endangered Species List



Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Sage Grouse Initiative has worked with 1,300 ranchers across the West to improve more than 5 million acres of sagebrush habitat—an area **twice as large as Yellowstone National Park**. These voluntary, incentive-based programs influenced the 2015 decision not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse as endangered.

“Without these [Farm Bill] lands ... sage-grouse would go extinct in two of the three sub-populations.”
— SCIENTIST ANDREW SHIRK ON THE FARM BILL AND SAGE-GROUSE IN EASTERN WASHINGTON

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE BY GERRIT VYN

Pays huge natural dividends



Farm Bill conservation programs provide big benefits in the Prairie Pothole Region:

- 37 million** Increase in number of waterfowl from 1992 to 2011
- 44 billion** Pounds of sediment prevented from reaching waterways in 2013
- 150 billion** Gallons of floodwater catchment capacity
- \$430 million** Annual economic impact of hunting and birdwatching
- \$1 billion** Net benefit of ecological services (water quality and wildlife habitat) over 20 years

USFWS MOUNTAIN-RAIRIE; NORTHERN SHOVELER BY PETE BLANCHARD

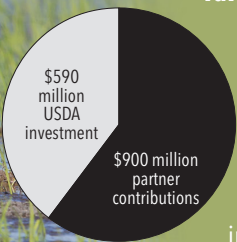
Creates eco-benefits for the entire farm

The ecological benefits created by Farm Bill grasslands also benefit the entire farm by improving soil health, and even providing pest control. In a study of rural farm areas in Wisconsin and Michigan, grassland plots within crop landscapes **doubled the numbers of grassland birds and increased the rates of predation of insect pest eggs by 30%**.



JASON JOHNSON

Promotes public-private partnerships



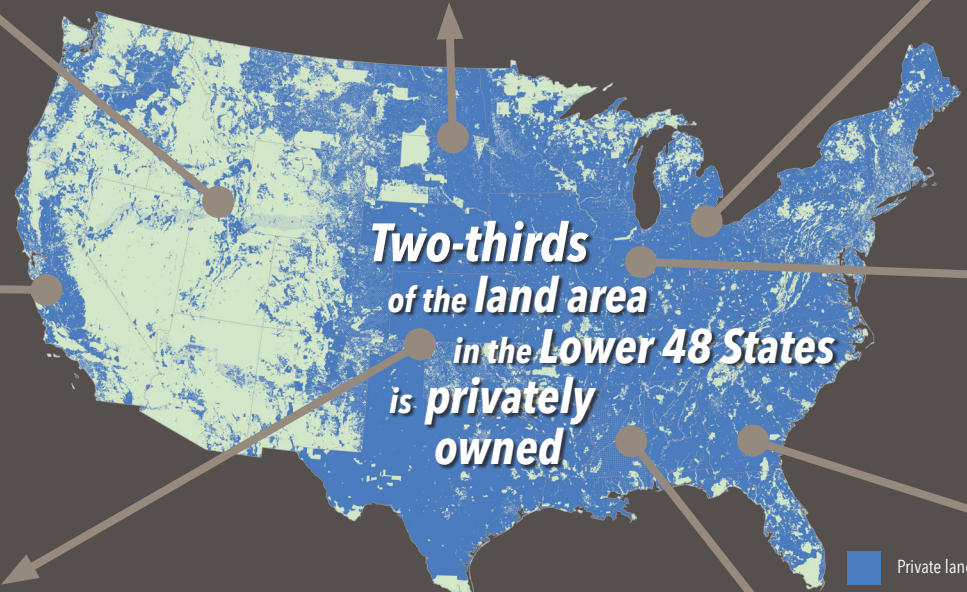
Through the Farm Bill's Regional Conservation Partnership Program, **20% of California's Central Valley rice acreage is temporarily flooded after harvest to provide important shallow water habitat** for thousands of migratory shorebirds. In the first 3 years of RCPP, USDA has used Farm Bill dollars to leverage partner contributions for \$1.49 billion in total conservation impact.

BLACK-NECKED STILT BY CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION

Protects vital prairie grasslands and wetlands

Sodsaver and Swampbuster are two crucial protections for water quality and wildlife. These Farm Bill provisions have ensured that thousands of acres of native prairie and wetlands have remained on the land. **Every year, wetlands protected by Swampbuster contribute nearly 4 million Mallards, Gadwalls, Blue-winged Teals, Northern Shovelers, and Northern Pintails to North America's waterfowl population.**

DUCKS UNLIMITED



THERE ARE 1.5 BILLION ACRES OF PRIVATE LAND IN THE LOWER 48 STATES, INCLUDING 911 MILLION ACRES OF FARMLAND. MAP BY JOCELYN AYCRIGG, UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO. DATA SOURCE: U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, GAP ANALYSIS PROGRAM (GAP), MAY 2016. PROTECTED AREAS DATABASE OF THE UNITED STATES (PAD-US), VERSION 1.4 COMBINED FEATURE CLASS.

Delivers return on investment in birds and clean water



25x
↑

In Illinois farm counties with the highest CRP sign-up rates, **spring bird counts for Henslow's Sparrows are 25 times greater now** than they were before CRP. In the Chicagoland area, Henslow's Sparrow grassland habitat provided **\$900 million in flood control, groundwater recharge, and water purification services.**

HENSLOW'S SPARROW BY JEFF TIMMONS/MACGULAY LIBRARY # 5556871

Sustains a timber economy and forest birds



88% of the timber harvest in the United States comes from private working forests

83% of the population distribution of Eastern forest birds comes from private working forests

Farm Bill Forestry programs have grown the South's longleaf pine forests by 50% to 4.7 million acres, providing a source of timber supply that keeps working forests working and wildlife habitat for 36 bird species, including Northern Bobwhite quail and the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

NORTHERN BOBWHITE BY JOAN CAMPBELL/MACGULAY LIBRARY # 30707771

Feeds North American waterfowl populations

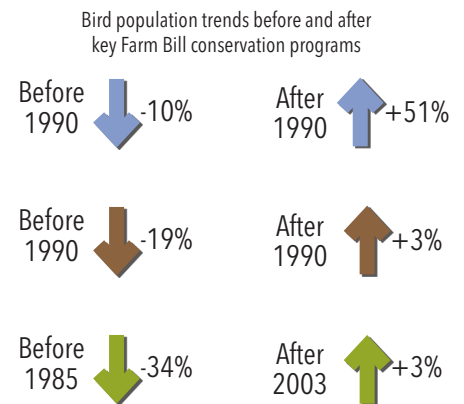
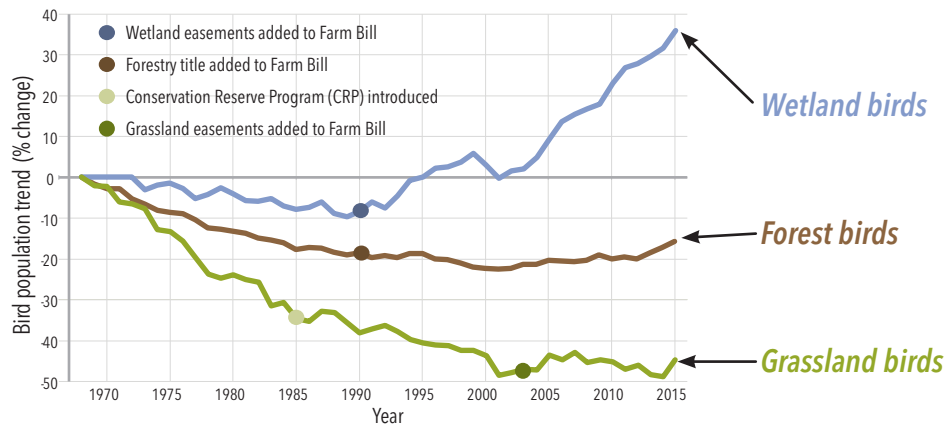


34% of all duck food energy in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley comes from Farm Bill wetlands, a critical food source for waterfowl species such as Northern Pintail, Mallard, and Wood Duck.

NORTHERN PINTAILS BY KEVIN MCGOWAN

Farm Bill conservation programs reverse bird population declines

After two decades of declines, wetland bird populations grew dramatically—and forest and grassland birds stabilized—following the introduction of key Farm Bill conservation programs.



GRAPH BY JOHN R. SAUER, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Conservation priorities for the next Farm Bill

1 Increase funding for Farm Bill conservation

The Farm Bill's voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs support farmers and ranchers financially while also supporting our natural infrastructure of grasslands and wetlands that provides flood mitigation, clean water, soil health, and wildlife habitat. The next Farm Bill is a prime opportunity to reinvest in programs that conserve and enhance habitat on marginal lands, secure easements to protect habitat, and encourage conservation partnerships on working lands.

2 Improve the impact of Farm Bill conservation programs on priority wildlife species

Farm Bill conservation programs should continue to incorporate state input to better target funding towards priority wildlife species identified in initiatives such as State Wildlife Action Plans, and require at least 10% of annual funding from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to be used for wildlife conservation practices. Increasing the availability of long-term conservation incentive payments and contracts can also encourage sustained management and benefits for wildlife.

3 Enhance the capacity of Farm Bill public-private partnerships

Partnerships are the key to delivering Farm Bill programs. Partner biologist positions play a critical role by matching landowners with the conservation programs that best fit the landowners' wildlife and land-use goals. These positions, which are supported by state and NGO partners working with USDA, result in more farmers, ranchers, and landowners taking advantage of the Farm Bill conservation programs available to them.

4 Support the use of science to maximize Farm Bill conservation effectiveness

Investing in monitoring and evaluation of Farm Bill conservation programs enables science-based decision-making and strategic planning. Dedicated funding for the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) would allow for measurement and adjustment of multi-year conservation projects and improve conservation outcomes.



The U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative is a forum of government agencies, non-government organizations, and bird initiatives helping partners across the continent meet their common bird conservation objectives.

stateofthebirds.org

Suggested citation: North American Bird Conservation Initiative, U.S. Committee. 2017. The State of the Birds 2017: A Farm Bill Special Report. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, N.Y. 4 pages.



Scientists documented an increase in Golden-winged Warbler numbers and breeding success on more than 5,700 acres of newly created nesting habitat across 150 private forests. These data are being used to fine-tune management recommendations to further benefit warbler breeding in working forests.

— CEAP ANALYSIS OF APPALACHIAN WORKING LANDS FOR WILDLIFE

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER BY GERRIT VYN

For citations and sources of information in this report, see stateofthebirds.org.

Support for Grassland Bird Conservation, Research, Evaluation, and Monitoring

Submitted by AFWA's Bird Conservation Committee, August 2017

Whereas, North American grassland ecosystems are home to a suite of declining birds, pollinators, and other grassland dependent wildlife; and

Whereas, those grasslands are under ongoing threats of conversion to cropland, non-native pasture, and development; and

Whereas, only 53% of the total acres in the Great Plains remain as intact grasslands, with 53 million acres of grassland converted to cropland across the Great Plains since 2009; and

Whereas, 84% of the intact habitat in the Great Plains is privately owned, and more than 80% of grassland bird distributions nationwide are on private lands (U.S. State of the Birds Report 2013); and

Whereas, in the Eastern U.S. true native grasslands are for practical purposes completely extirpated, and other habitats that support grassland species such as longleaf pine savannahs have declined from 90 million acres to 3 million acres; and

Whereas, other threats to intact grasslands such as woody invasion, fragmentation, introduction of non-native species, aquifer depletion, and lack of habitat management including prescribed burning further impact the diversity and health of grassland ecosystems, threatening our agricultural heritage and human quality of life in rural America; and

Whereas, grassland birds are dependent on multiple countries to meet full life cycle needs have declined most dramatically, with some populations declining by 70% since 1970 (North American Bird Conservation Initiative, State of North America's Birds, 2016); and petitions for listing as threatened or endangered are imminent; and

Whereas, grassland birds have shown some of the most dramatic population declines of any suite of North American avifauna (North American Bird Conservation Initiative, State of North America's Birds, 2016); and

Whereas, 27% of grassland birds of conservation concern have slipped below Watch List threshold (NABCI 2016), and many will likely lose 50% of their remaining population by 2050 (Partners In Flight 2016); and

Whereas, Grassland birds represent a significant proportion of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and state T&E species in nearly every U.S. state (e.g. Grasshopper Sparrow in 35 states); and

Whereas, important resident gamebird species, including Northern Bobwhite, Scaled Quail, Lesser and Greater Prairie-Chickens, and Ring-necked Pheasant, are also among the most steeply declining grassland birds, contributing to a loss of significant recreational income to states; and

Whereas, pollinators are declining and they play a critical role in grassland ecosystems and pollination services.

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recognizes the urgent plight of North America's grasslands and supports increased trilateral resources for conservation, research, monitoring, and evaluation of grasslands and the fauna that depend on them.

Be it further resolved, that this includes identifying specific trilateral threats and limiting factors causing the declines of the highest concern species and conservation efforts to stabilize and reverse trends.

Be it further resolved, that significant new investment in voluntary and incentive-based efforts, such as conservation provisions in the U.S. Farm Bill, to improve the quality and diversity of remaining grasslands and to slow or reverse declines in grassland bird populations, pollinators, and other grassland dependent wildlife is supported by State and Provincial members.

Double-crested Cormorants



Update for the Fisheries & Water Resources Committee

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting
Snowbird, UT ~ September 12, 2017

Brad Bortner, Division Chief, Migratory Bird Program



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Migratory Bird Program
Conserving America's Birds





Introduction

Depredation Orders Vacated

- **May 2016: U.S. District Court in D.C. vacates 2 depredation orders**
 - Affects Aquaculture DO & Public Resource DO for 24 states
 - Court said FWS:
 - Did not adequately examine effects of depredation orders on DCCO populations & other affected resources
 - Failed to consider a reasonable range of alternatives
- **FWS ordered to prepare adequate EA or EIS pursuant to NEPA before DOs can be re-instated**



Background

Result of court decision and actions to date

- In absence of DOs, lethal DCCO control activities may only be conducted under depredation permits
- Permit issuance is subject to NEPA
 - Adequate NEPA reviews required before new permits can be issued
 - FWS temporarily stopped issuing new permits for lethal take of DCCOs



Double-crested cormorants

Draft Environmental Assessment for issuing depredation permits

- **USDA Wildlife Services is a cooperating agency**
- **Considers only alternatives that could be implemented within framework of existing regulations**
 - Facilitate addressing immediate concerns expeditiously
- **Provides scope for issuing permits to:**
 - Manage risks to human health & safety
 - Reduce damage/threats of damage to aquaculture, property, natural resources
- **Draft in review, anticipate public comment period this fall**



Double-crested cormorants

Draft EA, cont'd

- **Concerns remain about damage to free-swimming fish**
 - Working to understand range, scope & extent of conflict
 - Limited scientific information available on biological & economic effects
- **Anticipate formal stakeholder engagement**
 - Seek agreement on biological, social, economic significance of wild fish/cormorant interactions
 - Identify suite of management objectives & alternatives
 - Identify & assemble needed scientific information
 - Continued State and Flyway engagement will be essential
- **Striving to build NEPA on a strong biological foundation & account for cumulative impacts of lethal control**

Migratory Bird Program - Conserving America's Birds

Thank you!

Brad Bortner

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www.fws.gov/birds

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Migratory Bird Program
Conserving America's Birds



Understanding Humans to Conserve Birds

Bird conservation fundamentally includes humans, and the most successful conservation actions are those aligned with the values, well-being, and perspectives of people. When conservationists work to conserve birds, they are often trying to change or reinforce human behavior. Therefore, studying and understanding the human dimensions of bird conservation are essential to develop effective bird conservation strategies.

What is Human Dimensions?

Human dimensions (HD) is a field of study that applies the social sciences to examine research questions that have implications for wildlife conservation efforts.

Integrating Social and Ecological Understanding Increases Success

Combining expertise from the fields of human dimensions and ornithology can improve bird conservation approaches and outcomes. It can lead to a better understanding of why people implement conservation actions or support funding for habitat conservation. It can also help inform where actions should be taken to benefit birds.

Human dimensions research can maximize limited financial and staff capacity by supporting the design of conservation programs that work with and for people. Such information can aid practitioners in determining the best ways to motivate and engage citizens to care about and support bird conservation.



*Flooded rice fields in Arkansas benefit birds and farmers.
Mike Checkett*



HD Success Story: Piping Plover Conservation at a Public Beach in Nebraska

Piping Plovers are state and federally threatened migratory shorebirds that nest on the beaches at Lake McConaughy, a popular recreation area in western Nebraska. This recreation area hosts over 1,000,000 visitors every year, most of whom visit during the plover nesting season. Management and recreation activities on this beach, especially off-leash dogs, have caused social conflict between recreationists and those supporting plover conservation.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and The University of Nebraska conducted a human dimensions study that

used various social science disciplines including political science, psychology, and communication science. Their study surveyed dog owners to examine reasons for using (or not using) leashes while visiting the lake. The researchers also evaluated communication strategies aimed at increasing compliance with leash laws.

Research Insights and Outcomes

1. Awareness of the law was not a barrier to dog owners leashing their pet; 80% of dog owners were aware of the leash law but compliance was less than 20% for all dog owners. Thus, simply providing information would be ineffective and a poor use of resources.
2. Pro-leashing messages that emphasized avoiding dog bites and dog fights were the most persuasive of the messages evaluated.

Human dimensions research was crucial in defining the reasons behind low leash law compliance at Lake McConaughy. This improved understanding led to an examination of existing communication techniques and evaluation of how communication strategies could be more effective.

Along with increased enforcement, human dimensions research influenced how park staff and agency personnel communicated with visitors about pet and human safety to



*Recreationists enjoying Lake McConaughy in Nebraska next to a Piping Plover nest. Joel Jorgensen
Inset photo: Piping Plover. Jim Fenton*

improve threatened and endangered species conservation. Although evaluation of the effectiveness of these communication strategies is still in progress, leash law compliance at Lake McConaughy increased from 16% in 2013-2014 to 67% in 2016.

This Piping Plover case study is one of many bird conservation success stories made possible by integrating human dimensions. Countless other projects could benefit from the inclusion of human dimensions research as well. Learn more about this study at <https://goo.gl/5p6Kyc> or contact Joel.Jorgensen@nebraska.gov.

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) is a coalition of state and federal government agencies, private organizations, and bird initiatives in the United States working to ensure the long-term health of North America's native bird populations. Its vision is to support healthy and abundant populations of North American birds that are valued by future generations and sustained by habitats that benefit birds and people.

The NABCI Human Dimensions Subcommittee aims to integrate the science and tools of human dimensions into bird conservation.

For More Information
NABCI Human Dimensions Subcommittee
<http://nabci-us.org/how-we-work/human-dimensions/>

Ashley Gramza, National Bird Conservation Social Science Coordinator
agramza@vt.edu

Partners in Flight

Helping Species at Risk | Keeping Common Birds Common
Voluntary Partnerships for Birds, Habitats, and People



Partners in Flight Management Steering Committee Action Brief Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting September 2017

Partners in Flight 2017 Work Plan Focus Areas Web site: partnersinflight.org

Partners in Flight is a broad collaboration among individuals and organizations working to meet landbird conservation at multiple scales including implementation of the 2016 *Landbird Conservation Plan*. Working groups are currently focusing on the following programmatic areas and short-term goals:

Engage **Flyway Councils** to implement landbird conservation objectives.

- a. The Mississippi, Central and Atlantic Flyway Council Non-Game Technical Sections hosted August 2017 working sessions to better integrate landbird population and habitat objectives into state and flyway projects.
- b. The PIF Western Working Group and the Pacific Flyway Council will host PIF working sessions in upcoming meetings for the same purpose.
- c. During Flyway Council meetings, shared priorities were the focus, for example, PIF Watch List species are included in at least one SWAP nationwide. Coordinated, multi-state and hypothesis based monitoring of key species and targeted habitat deliver are critical needs for both PIF and states.
- d. PIF requested feedback specifically from states on the 2016 Landbird Conservation Plan for future revisions and implementation strategies.

Engage **Joint Ventures (JVs)** to implement landbird conservation objectives.

- a. JVs have adopted an approach to deliver conservation for all bird initiatives through their partners in Bird Conservation Regions. However, JVs are often limited by their staff and partner capacity to expand the knowledge for a biological foundation for many species, provide spatially explicit decisions support tools or to deliver habitat in the right places under the best conditions.
- b. PIF and JVs are working through a process based on Strategic Habitat Conservation to identify capacity gaps for JVs specific to elements of that planning process. The intent is to help fill those priority capacity gaps through PIF partner network.

Integrate bird conservation objectives into **public land** management planning and implementation.

- a. Support the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in a joint effort to better utilize PIF tools so that they can be better integrated into management planning and implementation. PIF priority species and indicator/focal species can be used more effectively to enhance planning rule implementation. Specifically PIF is asking for forest-level support for our ongoing efforts to:
 - i. Collaborate with regional and forest-level planning teams (e.g. meeting with Forest Service planners at the last 4 PIF Western Working Group meetings.)
 - ii. Work with Wildlife Program Leads (via annual meetings and the Avian Conservation Team) and meet regularly with Washington Office leadership, planners, and others.
 - iii. Continue to share success stories as applied examples and to identify opportunities to further our efforts overcome challenges associated with Planning Rule implementation.
 - iv. Engage at regional and forest supervisor and planner level but also development of specific roadshows that incorporate silvicultural and habitat management practices that that benefit Watch List species.

Accomplishing PIF's vision promotes projects such as **multi-state led focal species projects** (Working groups on Bobolink, Canada Warbler, desert thrashers, Gold-winged Warbler, Loggerhead Shrike, Rusty Blackbird, Short-eared Owl, Wood Thrush, , Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo and others). Examples include:



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- a. Loggerhead Shrike Working Group was established in 2013 in order to coordinate research and conservation activities at a large geographic scale for this declining species. This international effort includes 11 states, 8 state wildlife agencies, universities, federal partners, NGOs, and Canadian partners. In order to maximize conservation efforts, the group has
 1. Developed a LOSH Conservation Action Plan outlining priorities for 5 years and continue implementation of distribution models
 2. Implemented a coordinated LOSH banding project to improve understanding of genetics, connectivity between populations, demographics, and limiting factors which impact population trends
 - b. Southwest desert thrasher conservation program. In the 2016 Landbird Conservation Plan update, desert thrashers were among the fastest declining species in North America. With significant support from BLM and the goal of preventing listing and a collaborative of state fish and game, federal agencies and NGOs are now working across 6 states. Current goals include:
 1. Implementation of a second year of data collection to determine current distribution, habitat use and management recommendations.
 2. Develop current and future distribution models for at risk species
 3. Use of the Avian Knowledge Network to coordinate standardized field protocols, data collection, security and management and interpretation across state boundaries.

Engage the **private sector** to meet bird conservation objectives on private lands and through the programs and actions of private land owners and companies.

- a. Promote development and implementation of projects within NRCS Farm Bill programs that meet upland bird habitat objectives. For example, in California utilizing EQIP (leveraged > \$17 million) to promote prescribed grazing practices and other conservation practices that benefit water, carbon and biodiversity.
- b. Engagement in field tours to promote the needs of landbirds within Farm Bill programs.
- c. Promote private lands biologists to implement Farm Bill programs that deliver PIF objectives. Working to develop a strategy to outline the infrastructure needed to implement the PIF Plan.
- d. Advance the modification of communication tower lighting to be more bird-friendly.

Advance all aspects of **full annual cycle** conservation to reverse declines of migratory birds.

- a. PIF VI is an international meeting in Costa Rica 30 October – 4 November 2017 to explore many aspects of full annual cycle conservation, most notable possible population bottlenecks in the nonbreeding season. Partners will further develop international bird conservation biological priorities and work with partners to develop projects.
- b. PIF will continue to promote full annual life cycle bird conservation, implementation of multi-national conservation initiatives and other priorities at an invited session at the International Ornithological Congress in Vancouver, BC in the summer 2018.

Cutting edge science forms a foundation of scientific knowledge about birds and the threats they face, guiding conservation planning and action.

- a. The PIF Species Assessment database (now the Avian Conservation Assessment Database or ACAD) now covers all bird species from Canada to Panama (Not just landbirds). A fantastic networking and training tool, PIF is now working with state biologists and Joint Ventures to update regional scores and applications of the ACAD tool. The tool benefits state agencies in their work to generate priority habitats that benefit multiple priority species.
- b. ACAD contains habitat, geographical and population assessment data to advance full annual cycle and population modeling, landscape conservation planning, and population estimation.
- c. PIF and the ACAD rely heavily on the Breeding Bird Survey, among the most reliable and cost effective citizen science programs in the world. BBS information is fundamental to monitoring trends/assessing vulnerability for PIF Watch List species and for producing annual State of the Birds population indicators for major habitats.



Partners in Flight Management Steering Committee

Our strategic goals have remained unchanged since 1990:

- 1) Maintain healthy bird populations, in natural numbers, in healthy sustainable habitats and ecosystems;
- 2) Keep species from becoming threatened or endangered through proactive measures and science based planning;
- 3) Promote full life-cycle conservation of migratory birds throughout the Western Hemisphere; and
- 4) Promote the value of birds as indicators of environmental health and human quality of life.

The Steering Committee supports the mission of Partners in Flight by:

- a. Developing and tracking progress towards annual work and longer-term strategic plans;
- b. Providing guidance and synergy among partners to maximize the benefits of shared expertise and capacities;
- c. Supporting, responding to, integrating, and acting upon recommendations from regional Landbird conservation efforts;
- d. Advancing international and full life-cycle conservation of birds;
- e. Sharing information regarding PIF-related activities and accomplishments;
- f. Developing briefs to inform and garner support of senior-level advocates;
- g. Recruiting needed expertise into working group activities;
- h. Proactively supporting adaptive natural resource management programs to better maintain and enhance self-sustaining populations of landbirds; and
- i. Providing vision and new direction for PIF as needed.

For more information contact Bob Ford (Robert_P_Ford@fws.gov)

Project Summary

We propose a coordinated, eight-state effort that will address high priority conservation needs of the Short-eared Owl, an umbrella species for western grasslands and shrublands. We present the means to a forward-looking prioritization of landscapes for conservation by implementing an adaptive management approach to various grazing treatments, and determining Short-eared Owl abundance, distribution, and habitat associations across the West, aligning results with predicted changes in climate.

Project Objectives

1. Identify impacts of various grazing practices on the occupancy rates by Short-eared Owl through direct manipulation on the landscape.
2. Quantify Short-eared Owl population size in each participating state to enable SWAP managers to assess and refine conservation priorities, threats, and actions.
3. Quantify how Short-eared Owl populations fluctuate spatially and temporally at state and flyway scales so that land and wildlife managers can contextualize local changes within the broader regional variation.
4. Identify distribution, habitat use, grazing, and climate influences of Short-eared Owls in the West such that SWAP managers can target and prioritize specific open-land landscapes to retain important areas and connect disjunct landscapes.
5. Generate statistically-rigorous, region-wide projections of Short-eared Owl viability based upon ensemble climate models to focus management actions for maximum conservation return for owls and other open-land species.
6. Implement high-value conservation actions prioritized by future population projections focused on most at risk populations and core populations of Short-eared Owls by engaging flyway councils, AFWA committees, state personnel, and other agencies to facilitate science delivery that effectively links results to priority state conservation opportunities.

Data Portal Development and Management

Data, database management, and effectively delivering products in a timely manner to land managers, decision makers, and all project partners. Specifically, KBO and partners with the Avian Knowledge Northwest (www.AvianKnowledgeNorthwest.net) and eBird Northwest (www.eBird.org/NW) will:

- Design and maintain a project website that hosts program documents including datasheets, protocols, training materials, annual results, etc. to facilitate both natural resource manager and citizen scientist engagement;
- Compile and make readily available existing Short-eared Owl data collected during pilot survey efforts (2015 - 2017);
- Create and maintain a data entry system with quality controls for citizen scientists that concurrently captures and documents volunteer hours and mileage as match;
- Provide data management and summary tools for state volunteer coordinators and overall program coordinators to track survey progress within each season, further verify data

quality, account for and report volunteer effort, and generate regular progress reports and datasets for analysis;

- Identify needs and develop targeted data-rich decision support tools that help natural resource managers implement Short-eared Owl conservation objectives; and
- Permanently archive all survey data in a standardized format in a widely used and accessible database (Avian Knowledge Northwest).

Budget

Federal request, \$499,992; Non-federal match, \$493,035

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www.klamathbird.org

Two decades of Klamath Bird Observatory science have informed the establishment, management, and expansion of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.
