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## **BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE PART II**

**Chair: Judy Camuso, ME Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**

**Vice-Chair: Tony Wilkinson, NY State Department of Environmental Conservation**

**11 March 2021**

### **North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference**

#### **Bird Conservation Committee role in AFWA DEIJ Initiatives- Update**

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

There were two conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice at the AFWA Bird Conservation Committee (BCC) meeting in September 2020:

- 1) Judith Scarl talked about the North American Bird Conservation Initiative's conversations about how DEIJ is relevant to bird conservation;
- 2) Crystal Egli, a diversity consultant who used to work for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, talked about: not making assumptions about the experiences and interests of people of color; not assuming that because people of color aren't engaging in outdoor recreation where you are, that they are not out there or not interested; understanding the history of space, and who has historically been excluded from or persecuted on a particular space, and how that affects people's relationships to outdoor recreation. Those presentations were meant to kick off a more in-depth conversation about the role of the BCC in DEIJ work.

BCC formed a small group to come up with some suggestions for the BCC's role in DEIJ work based on what states might need to address DEIJ, and how this intersects with birds and bird conservation. That group met in October 2020 with the Chair of AFWA's Diversity and Inclusion working Group, Jen Newmark from Nevada, and Taniya Bethke from South Dakota, another member of the D&I WG.

- The D&I WG ultimately wants to create guiding principles for DEIJ in the conservation world by developing best practices for states and regions. The next step is to launch a series of "coffee talks" that start the learning process for developing those Best Practices providing a forum for people to share their experiences and learn from each other about what's happening on the ground. They're aiming to have these conversations every other month. They'll pull key point from those conversations to help inform the guiding principles.

Next Steps: members of the BCC will participate in some of the discussion groups to incorporate birds and bird perspectives, specifically emphasizing that birds can be a gateway to getting people interested in wildlife and conservation.

State partners are also welcome to participate in NABCI's DEIJ Community of Practice, which will next meet in late spring/early summer.

#### **National Flyway Council Report**

Members of the National Flyway Council: Toby Boudreau (ID), Jeff VerSteeg (CO), Todd Bishop (IA) and Gray Anderson (VA). AFC currently chairs as this position rotates annually from west to east.

NFC is working on three items:

- 1) Monitoring paper
- 2) Golden Eagle Depredation Permit Allocation
- 3) Nomination to the North American Waterfowl Professional Education Plan (NAWPEP) - Shaun Oldenburger (TPWD) has agreed to represent the NFC

Additional ongoing items the NFC has been working on:

**Migratory Game Bird Monitoring Concerns-** The concerns about migratory bird surveys have been rising in the recent past. The influence of COVID clearly exacerbated the concerns as many surveys needed to be cancelled. A white paper outlining the concerns was put forth in the summer for endorsement by the NAWMP Plan Committee. The paper continues to be edited but the NFC desires to enable the process if possible as a show of support for the effort. NFC supports the need for a national conversation on the topic and supported taking the topic to the respective Technical Committees to develop a strategy to move forward.

**Golden Eagle Depredation Permit Allocation:** There are problems, primarily in western states, with the allocation of GOEA depredation permits so eagles may be captured and used for falconry purposes. Solutions have been tough to find as there are misunderstandings about the role of state and federal governments in accomplishing this task. Each Flyway Nongame Tech Section addressed this issue and brought similar recommendations for each Council for consideration, all of which passed. The NFC voted to form a National Committee to address the concerns, with PFC leading.

### **Feral and Free-Ranging Cat Work Group Report**

*Sara Schweitzer, Wildlife Diversity Coordinator, NC Wildlife Resources Commission*

The Working Group met on Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, from 1:00-3:00 PM (CST) by Zoom. About 56 people were present and represented various non-governmental organizations (e.g., American Bird Observatory, Point Blue), state (OH, NC, AR, OR, LA, HI, AZ, etc.) and federal (USFS, USFWS, NPS, DOD) agencies, zoos, and academia. Attendance included participants from Cuba and the Pacific Islands for the first time.

Achievements included:

- Completion of the [final web](#) and [print](#) versions of the Toolkit to Address Free-ranging Domestic Cats on Agency Lands Managed for Native Wildlife and Ecosystem Health.
- Model regulatory language that provides examples of appropriate language to manage domestic cats and protect wildlife resources. Provided model language includes: running at large, identification, sterilization, vaccination, abandonment, and duties of finders of stray animals.
- Draft update to 1997 AFWA Resolution on free-ranging domestic cats.

Actions that are underway, but not yet completed include:

- Presenting the Toolkit to Flyway Technical Committees and Sections;
- Drafting general, informative information on addressing free-ranging domestic cats on agency lands managed for native wildlife and ecosystem health, using input from the

Human Dimensions & Social Sciences Subcommittee of the Science and Research Committee;

- Drafting general language for education & outreach materials and for kiosk designs for agencies that want to provide information about free-ranging domestic cats on agency lands managed for native wildlife and ecosystem health;
- Developing a webinar for agencies that focuses on suggested actions to form beneficial partnerships and other topics in the Toolkit;
- Publication of the Toolkit as a monograph in the *Journal of Human-Wildlife Interactions* (ready for review by outside reviewers).

Grant Sizemore of the American Bird Conservancy provided information on recent bills introduced to state legislatures. One bill in California required microchipping cats by the agencies releasing them. In Hawaii, an introduced bill supporting Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) did not make it out of committee, and mandatory microchipping legislation is still active. An Illinois bill was introduced that would further support TNR management of free-ranging cats by the state's Dept. of Agriculture. Two bills were introduced in New Jersey focusing on state funds for TNR. In Virginia, a pro-TNR-related bill was recently defeated. Grant reminds us to work with our legislative liaisons to look for and act on cat-related legislation that would affect conservation of native wildlife and ecosystem health. Grant also reported these actions in California: an unsuccessful effort to introduce a licensing requirement of owned cats; cats affecting threatened and endangered species within the East Bay Regional Park District and work to develop partnerships between the park and local shelters; and a lawsuit in San Diego concerning the release of cats in TNR programs. Grant was recognized during the working group meeting for all his contributions and exemplary work to carry the products of the toolkit, resolution, and supporting documents to fruition.

Relative to disseminating the Toolkit, the Executive Summary will be provided to AFWA for publication in the Directors' Line e-newsletter, and the American Bird Conservancy will provide a printed copy to each Director. Additional outreach about the Toolkit will be provided to state ornithologists and law enforcement by email, and to each Committee or Sub-Committee with which working group members are associated.

The update to the [1997 AFWA Resolution](#) on free-ranging domestic cats was discussed and edited during our meeting. The edited version will be distributed to working group participants to finalize it by mid-April. The final copy from the working group will be sent to the Bird Conservation and Fish & Wildlife Health committees for review and approval by mid-May. Thereafter, the Resolution will be sent to the Resolution Committee for review and vote at the September 2021 AFWA meetings.

The final, approved Resolution will be shared with The Wildlife Society and the American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians, which also have resolutions on free-ranging domestic cats.

Other tasks that are underway, will be completed by working group participants in the coming months.

The working group has convened for nearly 5 years and except for finalizing some tasks, has met the goals and the objectives set forth by the Bird Conservation and Fish & Wildlife Health committees. Discussion during our meeting highlighted the need for participants to remain informed of issues associated with free-ranging domestic cats, but at this time, we recommend that the working group close, but with the option of reforming it in the future if significant situations occur.

## Bird-Fish Conflicts Working Group Report

*Scott Anderson, Bird Conservation Biologist, NC Wildlife Resources Commission*

- **USFWS published final EIS** (11/20/20) and final rule (12/29/20) on expanding management of conflicts associated with Double-crested Cormorants (DCCs)
- New rule became effective on **February 12th, 2021**
- The **USFWS (Lesley Kordella) provided a presentation and facilitated discussion** on double-crested cormorant (DCC) rulemaking updates, implementation, DCC monitoring, and a 5-year assessment of effectiveness and conflict status.
- Rule provides new state permit to address:
  - Prior aspects of individual permits, plus
  - **Depredation of wild and publicly stocked fish** managed by State fish and wildlife agencies or federally recognized Tribes and accessible to the public.
- Two teams are being set up comprised of a network of organizational partners that will work with the Service to outline two processes:
  - 1) Implementation
  - 2) Population Monitoring
  - Including: National Flyway Council, State Fish Chiefs, AFWA's BFRCWG, USDA WS, Tribes
- Maximum allowable take set within each of 4 DCC subpopulation. How take allocations decisions will be made is being developed by implementation team.
- By January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022, the **Service will identify a comprehensive cormorant monitoring strategy**.
- Every 5 years, the Service will report:
  - DCC population status and trends;
  - Reported lethal take of DCCs nationally and by sub-population;
  - Updated Potential Take Limit (PTL) analyses;
  - Determination of the state of the conflict and need for continued management;
  - A conflict-management decision and justification for either continued management or a proposed new management approach, if appropriate and needed.
- The WG discussed our **2021 Work Plan**, including:
  - **Participate with USFWS to evaluate and define DCCO monitoring protocols;**
  - Engage with the USFWS during and after DCCO rulemaking process;
  - Continued engagement post-DCCO rule finalization, **capturing feedback on its efficacy in different states and across specific applications;**
  - Considered **concomitant focus on avian species that are less cosmopolitan**, including the American white pelican and Neotropical cormorant; (**USFWS and WG will defer**, given intense focus on DCCO rule implementation at this time, but will look opportunistically to incorporate other piscivorous waterbirds in monitoring plans, as well as future ways to lump similar species guilds in coordinated management approaches)
  - A small team of WG members was identified to **develop a short briefing paper of best practices for state-agency leaders for mitigating conflict** relevant to avian predation issues
  - WG will be communicating and meeting to advance our work plan between now and September AFWA conference, but is in a holding status as to in-person or virtual formats.
  - Discussed and decided to **defer plans for an in-person workshop or symposium** focusing on individual case studies to now be targeted for 2024

(allowing time for lessons learned under new rule to accrue and timing to inform 2025, 5-year program assessment)

## **Harvest Information Program Working Group Report**

*Karen Waldrop, Chief Conservation Officer, Ducks Unlimited*

[See the full minutes](#) from the Harvest Information Program WG, which include an overview of USFWS updates on monitoring and data management related to HIP and harvest surveys, and a summary of a study to evaluate what motivates hunters to participate in HIP and harvest surveys.

HIP is very important to the states and USFWS to monitor hunters and hunter success, and it helps biologists make determinations about bag limits, hunting seasons, etc. However, states often use third-party vendors to collect hunter data, and data was often sub-par, since the vendor may not be invested in collecting good data. Kentucky had the most problems, and they revised their data collection to drastically improve data.

Education and communication are key to improving HIP data, including communicating what HIP is for and what the questions are really asking (for example, HIP questions within a state are just for hunting in that state).

### **HIP Pilot Program Update**

Objective: work with the states to improve data quality and to eliminate third party data entry where license vendors are entering information for hunters and not answering stratification questions. Part of this involves getting HIP data entry online so hunters can enter data themselves.

Progress- State Participation:

- KY was the first state to modify system to eliminate third party data entry and served as a model for the pilot
- LA and AR modified their systems to eliminate third party data entry in 2020
- Starting December 2020, CT has implemented system where hunters will go online or call in to get HIP registration
- AZ will implement new licensing system in 2021, and MT will move to online licensing in 2022
- KS is considering changes for 2022
- NC is initiating changes to move towards HIP registration that starts at the beginning of a year
- FL, IA, NV, SC, and ID are considering what modifications they can make

Additional next steps: make sure states have sufficient outreach materials to help educate hunters, coordinate with US Fish and Wildlife Service, and develop lessons learned (which will help with outreach to states).

Louisiana Case Study: Preliminary results were good and helped to eliminate data collection from individuals that were not migratory bird hunters. However, challenges were caused by state not being ready- initiative may not have been a high priority throughout the agency. Need everyone on board, from IT to education to law enforcement to biologists, etc. Challenges also stemmed from complicated license structure, where they had many different kinds of licenses and hunters are automatically signed up for certain things (like HIP) when they purchase different types of licenses.

## **PIF/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group Report**

Sara announced that after this meeting, she will step down from the Chair position. A new Chair is being sought and will be announced as soon as possible.

### **Landbird (PIF), Shorebird (USSCP), and Waterbird conservation initiatives updates:**

See the [Partners in Flight Spring Action Brief](#).

Bob Ford (PIF Coordinator, USFWS) provided an overview of actions by **PIF** as it moves into the next 30 years, and provided an Action Brief –

- PIF is working to establish two **Conservation Delivery Specialists** to work with PIF's Western and Eastern WG regions to support large-scale avian conservation efforts being undertaken and planned by state and federal agencies and NGOs through SWAPs, JVs, and Flyways. The goal is to amplify collaborative efforts for enhanced, strategic conservation outcomes. These efforts are part of NABCI's road to recovery for species most in danger of future listing. The proposal for this effort to address states' capacity needs as they continue to implement purposeful and impactful bird conservation work was supported by Flyways' Nongame Technical Committees/Sections during their winter 2021 meetings.
- PIF is working on a **Visioning** exercise, led by Nat Seavy of National Audubon Society, to learn from successes and challenges from the last 30 years, plan for the next 10 to 30 years, and increase PIF's inclusivity by connecting more people with nature and PIF's projects.
- PIF's **Communications Committee** has improved and streamlined science communications with updates and improvements to the website and social media streaming. See: [partnersinflight.org/blog](https://partnersinflight.org/blog)
- PIF's **Eastern Working Group** will have a fall meeting in October 2021, coalescing around its priority committees: Full Annual Cycle Conservation, Data Management, and Science Delivery. The WG received a Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grant to expand partnership work in the nonbreeding priority focus areas and to incorporate full annual cycle conservation, data management and dissemination, and development of science-based tools.
- PIF's **Western Working Group** is offering several virtual sessions on the AKN, MOTUS, and forest planning in the West. The sessions are on March 17<sup>th</sup>, April 7<sup>th</sup>, and April 13-14, respectively, and they are open to anyone who is interested in these topics. See: <https://partnersinflight.org/wwg-spring-2021-virtual-meeting-2/>
- The **2021 World Migratory Bird Day** theme is "Sing, Fly, Soar – Like a Bird!" There will be many virtual workshops, presentations, and panel discussions this year. See: <https://www.migratorybirdday.org/>
- This spring, PIF's **Steering Committee** will have U.S.-Canadian Co-Chairs, and the Canadian Wildlife Service continues to support a full-time PIF Coordinator.
- The **U.S. DOD PIF program** is celebrating their 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2021 and is one of the strongest and longest efforts of federal agencies. The whole Spring 2021 issue of *Natural Selections*, the DOD newsletter, is dedicated to DOD PIF.

Brad Andres (USSCP Coordinator, USFWS) provided an [Action Brief](#) and the following information about the initiative –

- The USSCP is completing a synopsis that will highlight **progress since the 2001 Plan** was developed, as well as identifying **future directions** which follow recent NABCI priorities. The update will be completed in May 2021.

- The Atlantic, Midcontinent, and Pacific flyway shorebird initiatives are developing a universal **America's Shorebird Flyways landing page** to present a unified web presence for all flyway-scale shorebird conservation efforts. The website should be launched early this summer.
- The strategic framework for the new **Midcontinent Shorebird Initiative** was developed during 3 workshops during fall 2020 in the U.S., and similar workshops are underway for interior South American partners.

Dave Gordon (USFWS) provided an update on the **Waterbird Council** and its re-activation.

- In Spring 2021, new and continuing members of the Council will meet virtually to discuss the Council's Terms of Reference and the Membership Principles. A plan to begin updating the Waterbirds of the Americas Conservation Initiative will be developed.

### **Common Threats Analysis**

- To address **threats** to landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds, the WG will begin a **common threats analysis** to identify significant human actions affecting habitats upon which bird species most in danger of future listing depend throughout their full annual cycle. The open standards for the practice of conservation will be used to begin this process that will be led by John Alexander (Klamath Bird Observatory) with Ken Rosenberg, Bob Ford, Bill Uihlein, Geoff Geupel, and Scott Anderson assisting.
- John Alexander, Geoff Geupel, and Brad Andres will examine existing, identified threats to birds in flyway conservation initiatives, Joint Venture conservation plans, and state wildlife action plans in the western region and provide a summary and proposed responses by the September 2021 meeting of this working group.

### **Strategies for Improved Avian Conservation Database Management**

- Phase 2 of the Avian Conservation Database Management project has been completed – *Developing a Colonial Waterbird Extension for the Avian Knowledge Network: Enhancing data management, storage, and sharing for improved management and study of colonial waterbirds.*
- Funding was provided by the Atlantic Flyway Council and is a multi-state effort that will enhance data storage, summary, and analyses for greatly improved population analyses and science-based decision-making.
- The overall project also includes acquisition and management of colonial waterbird data from the Pacific and Mississippi Flyways.
- Phase 3 of the project will build data warehouses and develop tools for data compilation and analyses, leading to enhanced decision-making at larger, flyway scales. Support for this phase of the work is under review by the Atlantic Flyway Council.

### **Policies, legislation, and funding initiatives that favor landbird, shorebird, and waterbird protection and restoration**

Jennifer Cipolletti (American Bird Conservancy, [jcipolletti@abcbirds.org](mailto:jcipolletti@abcbirds.org)) provided an overview of legislation of interest to this working group

- A letter of support to the Biden Administration for the MBTA will be available to sign onto soon, so contact Jennifer for questions.
- Reintroduction of the Migratory Bird Protection Act – there is an ask for it to provide regulatory certainty based on Best Management Practices

- ACAP (Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels) – stalled in Congress; however, Representative Lowenthal (CA) is working to get it picked up by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- Executive Order / 30x30 – What land will count toward the 30% is not clear, but it will be important for the bird community to provide information on ecosystems important to bird communities that may be over-looked; to use birds as guides to what lands are important to protect
- It is also important right now to support increased appropriations for Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, State and Tribal Wildlife Grant program, Duck Stamp Act, and others. Virtual “fly-ins” are underway and Jennifer encouraged us to be active.

Sara Schweitzer moves that the Bird Conservation Committee support the conservation delivery specialist concept to provide support to states for multi-state projects. EJ Williams seconds, and the motion carries.

### **Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Working Group Report**

*Alicia Hardin, Wildlife Division Administrator, NE Game and Parks Commission*

Discussed the importance of keeping our hunters and decision makers informed on the importance and use of HIP. Brainstormed some ways to best get the word out from articles in certain magazines to continuing to hit agency social media routes. Discussed possibility of USFWS putting a few slides with basic information on it and allowing states to add in more specifics to parts as another way to help spread the word; possible new work plan item.

Ken Richkus (USFWS) provided an update on the webless funding and talked more about the impacts of covid on some of the webless surveys this past year. The good news it appears that things will be more “back to normal” with webless surveys this coming year.

We had a briefing on the sandhill crane research going on in TX (Shaun Oldenburger) and an update on the eastern woodcock migration research project Brent Rudolph from the Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Society.

Due to a request last meeting, we invited John Taucher from the Forestry WG to speak about many of the FB programs and practices that can be used to do early successional forestry work on private lands. John also covered the important addition of shared position foresters to help with some of the pinch points in capacity (namely having enough qualified folks to write forest management plans).

And Rich Schultheis from KS provided a quick update on the Dove Task Force, the priority needs document has been approved, and that the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the dove reward banding project has gone well.

### **Waterfowl Working Group Report**

*Jeff Ver Steeg, Assistant Director, CO Parks and Wildlife*

- The Waterfowl Working Group (WWG) had a very informative and productive meeting on Tuesday afternoon, March 9. Approximately 75 individuals participated at some point during the 3-hour period, an increase of about 30% from last September.
- Vice-chair Craig LeSchack (DU) provided a review of our annual work plan.
- We received a legislative update from Jen Mock Schaeffer and much to our dismay, Jen announced her departure from AFWA.
- We had numerous updates, in-line with our Work Plan, to share information about, and to support the implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. We

received an update from the Human Dimensions/Public Engagement Team chair David Cobb (NC) and we heard from Cindy Longmire (D.J. Case and Associates) about the recently posted national summary reports from the hunter and birdwatcher surveys. They are available at **NAWMP.ORG**.

- Diane Eggeman reported on the efforts of the Integration Steering Committee to ensure the pieces of the NAWMP machine are functioning in a coordinated and collaborative fashion.
- Diane also provided an update on the important work of the North American Waterfowl Professional Education Plan (NAWPEP) that is “*Engaging and assisting universities, colleges and all NAWMP partners with establishing, sustaining, and enhancing academic and experiential programs in waterfowl and wetlands science and management, in order that sufficient numbers of inclusively diverse professionals with this expertise from across North America are available to sustain the professional capacity and excellence of future waterfowl science and management.*”
- Andy Raedeke, (Missouri Department of Conservation) presented information about the Federal electronic duck stamp and some potential areas for improvement which he initially raised in March 2020. Kari Duncan (Division of Bird Habitat Conservation, USFWS) and Suzanne Fellows (Duck Stamp office, USFWS) provided comments from the perspective of the Fish and Wildlife Service. The WWG approved the formation of a “Duck Stamp Task Group” to develop ideas for improving the marketing of the Federal Duck Stamp and to explore other changes to the e-Stamp that are desired by the states. Andy will chair the Task Group and we are working to identify additional government and non-government members. The Task Group will work the USFWS Duck Stamp Office to complete its charge.
- We had an excellent presentation on human dimensions work occurring within the Canadian NAWMP and Joint Venture programs in Canada by Howie Harshaw and Katie Sainsbury from the University of Alberta.
- Lastly, since our meeting last September, AFWA President Sara Parker Pauley created a President’s Fall Flights Task Force. The Task Force is co-chaired by Chuck Sykes (AL) and JD Strong (OK). Chuck provided a great overview and update on the work of the Task Force. The Task Force meets every 4-6 weeks and is making excellent progress towards strengthening the Fall Flights program. State Directors and Wildlife Chiefs are encouraged to complete a short on-line survey that was sent out on Tuesday morning. The requested information is critical to the efforts of the Task Force.

## **Resident Game Bird Working Group Report**

*Todd Bishop, Wildlife Bureau Chief, IA Department of Natural Resources*

Group had featured updates from the Ruffed Grouse Society, National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, and Pheasants Forever, which is launching its Call of the Uplands Initiative. These groups are already working towards the goals laid out by the 30x30 initiative. There is a newly-formed Eastern Grouse Working Group in the eastern states.

AFWA passed a resolution in 2019 on “addressing the long-term decline in small game hunter participation in the United States and mitigating its effects on habitat conservation delivery”. Resolution called for Bird Committee and Hunting and Shooting Sports Participation Committees to present a prioritized list of key questions/issues and recommended steps for subsequent actions.

Resident Game Bird Working Group developed a [Key Issues and Recommended Actions document](#), which includes 5 Prioritized Actions. Document was approved by this Working Group and also the Hunting and Shooting Sports Participation Committee.

Alicia Hardin moves that the Bird Conservation Committee accept the “Small Game Hunter R3: Key Issues and Recommended Actions” document put forth by the Resident Game Bird Working Group. Jerome Ford seconds the motion. Motion carries.

### **Grassland Bird Working Group Follow Up**

*Bill White, Community and Private Land Conservation Branch Chief at Missouri Department of Conservation*

See [BCCI notes](#) for in-depth report from Grassland Working Group.

The Working Group is finalizing its reports and will bring these back to the Bird Conservation Committee for approval. The group is asking to continue the work of the Grassland Work Group to:

- Finalize the reports from the gap analysis, Central Grassland Roadmap Summit, and MS Flyway Region Grassland Summit (2021)
- Explore the needs to continue renewed Grassland Work Group, possibly in collaboration with the Ag Committee and/or Science and Research Committee (after 2021)
- Continue to encourage state participation in Roadmap Summit partnerships
- Consider a future NCN to dedicate resources to deliver key priorities and actions identified in Roadmap efforts

The group asks for approval to continue their work until the fall AFWA meeting, and Chairwoman Camuso approves.

### **Southern Wings Progress Updates**

*Eric Gardner, Wildlife Program Director, WA Department of Fish and Wildlife*

Southern Wings is a partnership of State Fish & Wildlife Agencies to achieve annual life-cycle conservation of migratory birds. At its core, it is a mechanism to facilitate state fish and wildlife agency’s voluntary participation in conservation actions and projects in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean that conserve shared priority species. To date, across 11 countries Southern Wings has facilitated conservation action for 39 states and their contributions of almost 3.2 million. Southern Wings projects span countries, habitats, and species. We support conservation action for shorebirds and waterbirds in the Caribbean, Laguna Madre, Mexico, and western Mexico; for landbirds in Central and South America; and for grassland birds in northern Mexico. The program also supports research to identify stopover and nonbreeding habitat to inform where we should work on the ground. For a modest investment, Southern Wings can help state fish and wildlife agencies move closer to reaching their State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAP) goals and objectives for priority SGCN bird species. Southern Wings sent a survey to Wildlife Diversity Program Managers and State Wildlife Action Plan Coordinators to help improve the program by better understanding how we can support state agency SWAP implementation. The responses highlighted potential action items and things to emphasize in program implementation. We also received information on state priority SGCN species which will guide project development and outreach. The input on what is limiting state agency participation highlighted financial limitations as the top impediment. The survey also showed a concern about the negative perception around sending state agency funds outside of the state. Based on the survey, next steps include 1) improving our program outreach and use of migratory connectivity to identify annual life-cycle needs; 2) developing a template for an annual life-cycle

section of the SWAPs; and 3) considering a multi-state conservation grant proposal to support packaging connectivity information for states and develop outreach materials for Southern Wings.