

# AFWA Bird Conservation Committee (BCC)

## 2018 Work Plan

Draft 17 October 2017

### BCC CHARGE

- Keep the Association informed of developments affecting bird conservation.
- Promote policies necessary to ensure the long-term conservation of bird populations and their habitats, sustainable hunting and the public's ability to enjoy birds.
- Maintain coordination with federal agency and NGO partners and partners throughout the western hemisphere.
- Work closely with the flyway councils and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.
- Contribute to the activities and involvement of the International Relations Committee and other groups regarding international issues that affect birds.

The Bird Conservation Committee currently has four long-term Working Groups and three finite-duration Work/Task Groups that carry out the actions and tasks of the Bird Conservation Committee. Southern Wings is an independent initiative that originated from and reports to the Bird Conservation Committee.

### Short-Term Work/Task Groups

#### *Grassland Work Group*

Chair: Bill White (MO)

Vice-Chair: Greg Link (ND)

Date Work Group Formed: December 2016

Expected Termination Date: March 2019

#### Work Group Charge:

In September 2016, the Bird Conservation Committee discussed the need to collaboratively address the significant declines faced by many grassland-associated bird species. Each long-term Bird Conservation Committee Working Group (PIF/Shorebird/Waterbird, Resident Game Bird, Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird, Waterfowl) nominated individuals from their Working Group to serve on a grassland-focused work group. The BCC established a Work Group charged to complete the following four tasks within two years:

1. **Develop a resolution** outlining the crisis and prioritizing grassland birds conservation by AFWA and participating states for consideration by the AFWA Resolutions Committee,
2. **Facilitate evaluation of tri-national grassland habitats and bird conservation efforts and develop a report** with synopsis of current programs (goals, objectives, funding

entities, etc.) and recommendations for collaboratively and collectively addressing declines in the broad suite of grassland birds,

3. **Develop an NCN** to address grassland bird conservation needs currently identified by conservation partners and to operationally address potential new recommendations from the above evaluation, and
4. **Encourage prioritization** of grassland birds conservation in budgeting of federal agencies, and identify other sources of funding that could support grassland conservation work.

#### Major Activities and Accomplishments in 2017:

1. Work Group leadership identified and Work Group initiated
2. Established and Activated 4 subcommittees to address 4 charges assigned to Working Group
3. Developed and submitted NCN to AFWA in March 2017
4. Developed and submitted resolution to AFWA in August 2017
5. Developed a template for assessing bird conservation efforts

#### Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

1. Revise and resubmit NCN to AFWA at the 2018 North American
2. Pilot assessment template with the Mississippi Flyway Council Bird Technical Section
3. Take lessons learned from pilot and apply to nationwide effort to assess bird conservation efforts
4. Develop recommendations for prioritizing funding for bird initiatives in federal agencies
5. Facilitate increased communication with the Bird Conservation Committee and other interested groups relating to Grassland Working Group efforts.

### ***Feral and Free-Ranging Cat Task Group***

Chair: Sara Schweitzer (NC)

Vice-Chair: Colin Gillin (OR)

Date Work Group Formed: March 2016

Expected Termination Date: Group's tenure expanded for at least one year as of September 2017

#### Work Group Charge:

Formed by AFWA in March 2016, **this interdisciplinary Work/Task Group is furthering AFWA Resolution 1997-05-08 "Control and Management of Feral and Free-ranging Cats."** The Bird Conservation Committee and Fish and Wildlife Health Committee play leadership roles in this Work/Task Group, and representatives from AFWA's Amphibians and Reptile Conservation, Education/Outreach/Diversity, Invasive Species, Law Enforcement, Legal, and Wildlife Resource Policy Committees participate. Specifically, the Work Group was charged with the following tasks:

1. Review regulatory language and identify current restrictions on release, feeding, and/or maintaining feral and free-ranging cats on state lands managed for native wildlife conservation purposes;
2. Identify existing regulations for domestic animals that may encompass feral and free-ranging cats;
3. Propose responses by state agencies lacking regulations making it unlawful to maintain, release, and/or feed feral and free-ranging cats;
4. Provide examples of successful methods state agencies are using to remove feral and free-ranging cats from conservation lands;
5. Provide examples of successful partnerships between wildlife advocates and cat advocates to help state agencies develop outreach strategies;
6. Present a report on these tasks to the BCC during one of its regular meetings in 2017.

In September 2017, the AFWA Directors approved an action to extend the charge of this Work Group by at least a year so that the Work Group can:

1. Analyze their compilation of state laws and administrative rules pertaining to feral and free-ranging cats;
2. Distribute a survey, which can be answered anonymously, asking states about feral cat challenges and methods of addressing feral cats on state lands; and
3. Develop Best Management Practices for addressing feral and free-ranging cat issues on state lands managed for wildlife

#### Major Activities and Accomplishments 2016 and 2017:

1. Completed a comprehensive compilation of states' regulations and policies that may apply to feral or free-ranging cats
2. Conducted a follow-up survey, targeted at state agency wildlife attorneys, to evaluate accuracy of regulation compilation
3. Drafted a survey to anonymously ask states about methods they are using to remove feral and free-ranging cats from conservation lands
4. Broadly requested information from states and other bird conservation partners about successful partnerships between wildlife advocates and cat advocates; few, if any, long-term successful partnerships exist
5. Compiled a comprehensive bibliography of reports and scientific literature on feral cats
6. Reported to the Bird Committee in September 2017

#### Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

1. Continued assessment of state agency laws and regulations, including:
  - a. Additional communications with states' attorneys to foster increased understanding of state laws related to feral and free-ranging cats and how these laws may impact management of lands and wildlife;

- b. Further review of the American Bar Association Resolution 102B (August 2017) and its implications;
2. Distribution and analysis of survey that anonymously asks states about methods they are using to remove feral and free-ranging cats from conservation lands;
3. Development of Best Management Practices document and Decision Tree informed by results of survey. Document will include:
  - a. Summary of important issues for states to consider
  - b. Each issue or section will have accompanying list (some prioritized where appropriate) of best practice actions to eliminate or avoid establishment of feral and free-ranging cat colonies on state conservation lands;
4. Compilation of a comprehensive list of potential partners with whom states might work to address this issue;
5. Provide recommendations of policy language to lend support to states working on this issue;
6. Prepare a webinar for agencies during which WG materials will be reviewed and discussed;
7. Form working relationship with Project WILD or similar education-focused group, and:
  - a. Provide input to the development of educational/outreach materials with a consistent message about the impacts of feral and free-ranging cats on wildlife
  - b. Partner with education group to distribute these messages strategically;
8. Link products to AFWA web site so they are readily available to agencies.

### ***Harvest Information Program (HIP) Review Task Group***

Chair: Ross Melinchuk (TX)

Vice-Chair: None

Date Work Group Formed: March 2016

Expected Termination Date: Group's tenure expanded for at least two years to oversee development and initial implementation of pilot, anticipated in 2019.

#### Work Group Charge:

In response to numerous challenges associated with HIP data collection, sampling frames, and administration, in March 2016 the Bird Conservation Committee formed a Task Group with the following charge: ***Review current HIP procedures at both state and federal levels, specify objectives, and make recommendations to improve sample frames, modernize survey design, increase reliability of estimates, and control costs.***

With AFWA's acceptance of the Working Group's draft report in September 2017 proposing a potential solution to improve HIP, the next phase of this Work Group's charge will focus on **overseeing the development and implementation of a pilot project to provide a proof of concept for a state-driven, nationally implemented system of migratory bird harvest data collection.**

### Major Activities and Accomplishments 2016 and 2017:

1. Evaluated current HIP and identified potential areas of improvement related to survey design, data collection, and data submission
2. Presented draft report to the AFWA Bird Conservation Committee, each Flyway Council, AFWA's Executive Committee, and the AFWA Directors proposing a nationalized, state-driven standardized data collection system in which data is obtained directly from hunters.

### Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

The Work Group will oversee development and implementation of a voluntary pilot project, involving 3-4 states per Flyway, to ensure the proposed nationalized, standardized data collection system is robust enough to accommodate all states and to address existing concerns. With a goal of implementing this pilot system in 2019, in 2018 the HIP WG will work with flyways, state fish and wildlife agencies, the USFWS, and associated non-government partners to:

1. Identify desired features and outcomes for a pilot program
2. Identify a potential mechanism of funding for a pilot program
3. Identify and form group to develop a strategy for engaging states
4. Identify and form a group to develop a marketing and communications plan
5. Develop and distribute an RFP to develop a nationalized data entry system for HIP pilot data

## **Long-Term Working Groups**

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

Chair: Sara Schweitzer (NC)

Vice-Chair: Eric Gardner (WA)

### Work Group Charge:

To serve as a forum for discussion of bird conservation 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.

### **Focus Area and Goals**

1. To integrate outcomes of landbird, shorebird, and waterbird initiatives (Bird Conservation Plan Partnerships);
2. To clearly identify significant threats to landbird, shorebird, and waterbird populations;
3. To evaluate alternative strategies for bird conservation action, come to agreement, and make recommendations to AFWA leadership;
4. To align priorities and actions of the national Bird Conservation Plan Partnerships with implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans.

## Major Activities and Accomplishments in 2017:

### **Goal 1. Integrate outcomes of landbird, shorebird, and waterbird initiatives**

1. Representatives from this WG served on a NABCI subcommittee to develop the 2017 State of the Birds report highlighting the importance of Farm Bill conservation programs to birds.
2. Members of this WG served as PIF/SB/WB WG representatives to the Grassland WG
3. Provided a forum for partners to provide feedback on proposed Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network sites within 3 states (Washington, Kansas, Georgia)
4. Provided a forum for states to give feedback on the Double-crested Cormorant population management plan, which involves federal and state coordination to develop a framework for managing conflict species
5. Discussed multi-state avian conservation and research projects (Desert Thrasher; Short-eared Owl; Atlantic Coast Predator Management BMP document and demonstration sites for shorebirds), providing a forum for states to provide feedback and fine-tune initiatives.

### **Goal 2. Clearly identify significant threats to landbird, shorebird, and waterbird populations**

1. Members of this WG, including the Chair, participated on the Feral and Free-Ranging Cat WG, which originated from a proposal by the PIF/SB/WB WG.

### **Goal 3. Evaluate new strategies for bird conservation action and make recommendations to AFWA leadership**

1. Provided a forum to discuss the Avian Conservation Assessment Database (ACAD) and states' involvement in ACAD
2. Helped to facilitate participation in multi-state projects, using the Avian Knowledge Network (AKN) for data management (e.g. the Short-eared Owl and Desert Thrasher projects) through discussions to address states' concerns regarding data submission to, and security of, the AKN.
3. Provided feedback on AKN design and implementation, which led to progress on development of a national node and bulk upload tool for data management through the AKN

## Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

### **Goal 1. Integrate outcomes of landbird, shorebird, and waterbird initiatives**

1. Identify common or similar priority actions within Conservation Plans that can be implemented using state wildlife action plans and grants, as well as AFWA programs such as the Southern Wings program;
2. Participate in PIF, USSCP, and Waterbird Council meetings and contribute to initiatives
  - a. [PIF VI](#), October 30 – November 3, 2017, San Jose, Costa Rica;
  - b. [Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group](#), November 10-14, Paracas, Peru.

### **Goal 2. Clearly identify significant threats to landbird, shorebird, and waterbird populations**

1. Continue contributing to Feral and Free-Ranging Cat Working Group efforts;
2. Evaluate whether there is a need to further define impacts of bird collisions with buildings, and insecticides on bird food resources. Evaluate what approach would be necessary to examine population-level impacts of these stressors and identify what role the WG can play in this process, as needed.

**Goal 3. Evaluate new strategies for bird conservation action and make recommendations to AFWA leadership**

1. Advance data management and assessment tools, especially for full annual cycle focused projects;
  - a. Provide workshops and/or webinars at Flyway and other meetings that clarify the purpose and benefits of different data management and assessment tools, and try to increase collaboration between large-scale data management efforts;
  - b. Continue contributing to multi-state projects;
  - c. Engage states during enhancement of ACAD (Avian Conservation Assessment Database).
2. Contribute to Grassland Working Group efforts to enhance conservation of grassland habitats.

**Goal 4. Support policies, legislation, and funding initiatives that favor landbird, shorebird, and waterbird protection and restoration.**

1. Identify high priority issues affecting conservation of landbird, shorebird, and waterbird populations and habitats and provide recommendations on these issues to the Bird Conservation Committee.

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

Chair: Randy Myers (LA)

Vice-Chair: Dave Morrison (TX)

Work Group Charge

The working group will work closely with the Bird Conservation Committee, the flyway councils, interagency advisory groups, and the Department of the Interior to identify problems and management opportunities regarding migratory shore and upland game birds. The working group should develop objectives and strategies for solving problems and addressing management challenges.

The working group should recognize the international nature of managing migratory shore and upland game birds, and support those initiatives that involve international negotiations and be prepared to contribute to the activities and involvement of the International Relations Committee and the Bird Conservation Committee as appropriate.

Major Activities and Accomplishments in 2017:

1. Provided recommendations to the HIP work group to ensure accurate data is collected for use in harvest recommendations, including the draft report from the National Dove Task Force that is a large component of the draft plan from the HIP WG
2. Directed the work and tracked the progress of the National Dove Task Force and Woodcock Task Force.
3. Worked with the Woodcock Task Force in an effort to create an Early Successional Forest Work Group to help address future needs of woodcock and related species
4. Established the process for the update to the dove priority information needs document

#### Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

1. Review needs and determine the best approach to maintain relevancy with current partners and look to expand participation
2. Make recommendations regarding the modified dove call count survey based on research results expected in March 2018
3. Review and disseminate updated research needs of the MSUGBWG, including anticipated progress on the Dove priority information needs document by the National Dove Task Force
4. Continue participation in the Grassland Bird Work Group
5. Review and comment on the Midcontinent Sandhill Crane Management Plan as needed
6. Continue to work with the HIP WG to finalize the draft implementation plan

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

Chair: Breck Carmichael (SC)

Vice-Chair: Karie Decker (NE)

#### **Focus Areas and Goals**

1. Provide national leadership on issues related to resident game birds.
2. Encourage and coordinate partnerships that integrate the various bird conservation plans, game and nongame, and their delivery via projects on the ground.
3. Serve as a forum for discussion of key issues and policy actions that impact resident game bird management and conservation, and provide leadership in consensus and partnership building among bird conservation professionals.
4. Ensure representation of resident game birds in decisions and discussions of the AFWA Bird Conservation Committee, as well as the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), and provide recommendations and guidance on key issues concerning resident game bird management and conservation to the Committee and the NABCI.
5. To promote, protect and enhance the future of resident game bird hunting as part of our hunting heritage, while working to conserve the species-specific resources and their habitats that are under our stewardship.

#### Major Activities and Accomplishments in 2017:

1. Shared updates from national plan coordinators and collaborators at March 2017 North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference and September 2017 Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting.
2. Provided examples of messaging being used to convey benefits of habitat management for upland game birds to other bird species in support of a project by the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Private and Working Lands Subcommittee, on which the RGBWG Chair serves.
3. Representatives from this WG served on a NABCI subcommittee to develop the 2017 State of the Birds report highlighting the importance of Farm Bill conservation programs to birds.
4. Small team from the WG reviewed the national Chukar/Gray Partridge plan prior to its submittal to the Western association Directors.
5. Through a survey, solicited information from states about availability of data related to hunter participation, harvest, and populations of 19 resident game birds. All 50 states participated in the survey. Draft report was completed and will be reviewed by the RGBWG.
6. Chair and several members serve on Grassland WG.

#### Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

1. Collaborate among agencies, national management plan coordinators and NGO partners through information exchange.
2. Monitor implementation of national species management plans and coordinate future revisions of those plans.
3. In coordination with species-specific management boards and committees, develop recommendations for a system of monitoring of hunter numbers and annual harvests of resident game birds that is consistent among states and can serve as a reliable range-wide index of population status and hunter participation
4. Since any SGCN species conservation efforts would be eligible for Blue Ribbon Panel funding, this WG will explore avenues to support Blue Ribbon Panel initiatives.
5. Participate in Bird Conservation Committee's Grassland Work Group, formed in September 2016.

### **Waterfowl Working Group (WWG)**

Chair: Diane Eggeman (FL)

Vice-Chair: Craig LeSchack (Ducks Unlimited)

### **Subcommittee Charge**

1. Contribute to the implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) 2012 Revision to conserve priority landscapes for waterfowl habitat and to advance the human dimensions aspects of the Plan;
2. Advance policies, legislation, and funding initiatives (NAWCA and others) in support of wetland protection and restoration, with consideration of drought, water quality, and climate change issues;

3. Fully implement the *AFWA Action Plan for State Contributions to Waterfowl and Wetland Habitat Conservation Projects in Canada*, and
4. Initiate and support wetland and waterfowl habitat information sharing with Congress, state, federal, and NGO partners, and the public.

#### Major Activities and Accomplishments in 2017:

1. The Waterfowl Working Group discussed concerns about USFWS migratory bird program funding and initiated an action item for the Bird Conservation Committee. As a result, a letter was sent by the AFWA President to the USFWS Director that conveyed the benefits of the migratory bird program and requested that USFWS increase resources to implement migratory bird conservation across the country.
2. The Waterfowl Working Group discussed the widespread wetland drainage/conversion occurring in the Prairie Pothole Region and initiated an action item for the Bird Conservation Committee. As a result, the AFWA President sent a letter to the USDA expressing the immediate urgency that NRCS take appropriate action to:
  - a. Resume use of current, technically rigorous methods for wetland determination;
  - b. Ensure intent of Swampbuster is implemented and public benefits of wetlands are retained;
  - c. Provide a commitment to use appropriate data necessary to accurately delineate wetlands, consistent with the OIG report and the Congressional intent of Swampbuster provisions.
3. Engaged the State Contributions Task Force to initiate a branding effort to enhance the profile and exposure of this important international conservation program.
4. Reconvened the Water Task Team with Tom Moorman (DU) as chair.

#### Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

##### **1. NAWMP Implementation**

- a. Facilitate discussions to identify and promote ways to better understand and incorporate user / supporter desires (human dimension elements) in planning and delivering waterfowl management actions and assist in the coordination of NAWMP human dimension efforts with other BCC bird working groups, NABCI, Flyway Councils, etc.
- b. Identify priority actions to assist states, NGOs and others to effect waterfowl conservation at state and national levels and to achieve the new NAWMP objectives.
- c. Continue to provide overviews of NAWMP implementation, including reports from IIC, PET, HDWG, etc. and discuss the direction and needs of the waterfowl community to advance the implementation of the 2012 NAWMP Revision and development of the 2018 NAWMP Update.
- d. Seek ways and means to encourage increased integration of waterfowl management elements through discussions and contribute to a potential review of the efficiency of existing waterfowl management processes and structures.
- e. Encourage participation in efforts to advance NAWMP implementation.

## **2. Wetland Conservation / Protection**

- a. Re-engage the Federal Duck Stamp Task Force to work on two issues. First, analyze state duck stamp sales data for potential impacts of the recent price increase. Second, work with Amplex (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service e-vendor for the Federal Duck Stamp) to implement and collect data via a mail and/or web-based survey. This task force was established to assess the impacts of Federal Duck Stamp price increase on license sales, recruitment and retention of hunters and other issues, resulting in a set of recommendations for AFWA's consideration.
- b. Appoint a new chair for the Water Task Team and continue to assess the value of developing a plenary session for consideration at a future North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. In addition, the Team will discuss their concept with the Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife relevancy sub-committee. This team was established to examine and report on water-based issues emerging across the states that have a relationship to wetland habitat loss/conservation (e.g., increasing algae outbreaks, municipalities with increased treatment costs due to nitrogen).
- c. Continue to share policy/legislative information and strategies to support state and NGO efforts to increase NAWCA appropriations and to ensure the legislation or companion programs (i.e. PR Interest, coastal funding) are re-authorized by Congress.
- d. Continue work with the Bird Conservation and Budget and Legislative Committees on the issue of funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Program to ensure adequate allocation of resources to support critical programs. Monitor funding and staffing levels and allocation of these resources within the USFWS.

## **3. State Contributions to Canada Action Plan Implementation**

- a. The Task Force on State Contributions to Canada will continue to develop a branding program and present it to the WWG during its meeting at the 2018 North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference.
- b. The Task Force on State Contributions to Canada will develop a draft annual work plan for implementing the revised State Contributions Action Plan.

## **4. Information Sharing**

- a. Engage with the NAWMP Public Engagement Team to identify opportunities to broaden support for wetland habitat conservation and wetland management by creating a greater understanding of the value and impacts of wetland conservation on human (societal) health and welfare.
- b. Inform members about wetland conservation issues affecting waterfowl, including the Deepwater Horizon oil spill fund and its focus areas and future direction of the program.

- c. Inform legislative leaders (state/national) about wetland and waterfowl issues and accomplishments of state and NGO actions, using normal AFWA governance procedures (e.g. committee recommendation for action or annual resolution and approval at business).

## ***Southern Wings***

***While not a formal Working Group, Southern Wings is an independent initiative that originated from and reports to the Bird Conservation Committee.***

Chair: Jim deVos (AZ)

Vice-Chair: None

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

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

### Major Accomplishments To Date:

1. Since its inception, 30 states have contributed over 2.7 million on the ground for conservation.
2. In 2017, Southern Wings developed a marketing brochure to more effectively engage new partners in contributing to this program.

### Anticipated Activities and Objectives for 2018:

3. Take action to engage more states
4. Work with NRDAR staff to get wintering grounds work supported via recent settlements
5. Take action to engage new partners to work alongside state fish and wildlife agencies
6. Continue to implement Southern Wings and maintain support for current project.