



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE PART I

Chair: Gordon Myers, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Proxy Chair for Meeting: David Cobb, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

12 September 2016
10:15am-3:00pm

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting
Marriott Philadelphia Downtown
Philadelphia, PA
Draft notes

All powerpoint presentations are [available online](#).

US Fish & Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Program Updates

Brad Bortner, Division Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management
Sarah Mott, Division Chief, Division of Bird Habitat Conservation

[View the presentation](#) for a comprehensive overview of Migratory Bird program updates.

USFWS Migratory Bird Program- Budget Discussion

Brad Bortner, Division Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management

Background: The USFWS Migratory Birds program provides critical support for state-based bird conservation, management, and monitoring. Given recent declines in the USFWS Migratory Birds budget, USFWS was asked to present an overview of the budget formulation within USFWS and DOI, recent changes to the Migratory Birds budget, and internal prioritization within the Service. The purpose of this presentation was so that states can understand the budget process and changes in order to determine how the states can help to support a strong budget within the Service.

Brad Bortner gave a short [presentation \(starts on slide 26\)](#) followed by questions and discussion. Note that funding for the Migratory Birds program has been steady or declining for several years, but costs and expenses have increased. There is no new money in the federal budget system; if you propose something, you must find a place to take something away. The administration has to weigh many factors against each other: administration priorities (OMB, Congress), Interior priorities, etc.

Question: If trends for migratory bird funding are declining, does that mirror overall USFWS funding trends?

Answer (follow up post-meeting): The Migratory Bird Program budget usually runs between 3.6% to 4.28% of total USFWS budget. In 2010, Mig Bird Program budget was 4.28% of total budget, then 4.10% (2011), 4.04% (2012), 3.65% (2013), 3.65% (2014), 3.65% (2015), 3.73% (2016).

Question: Brad mentioned that Service administrators have to report on their budgets and their metrics of success. What metrics does he have to report on, and how are you measuring success?

Answer (follow up post-meeting): Division of Migratory Bird Management (Brad's division) has one metric of success:

- CSF 6.1 Percent of all migratory bird species that are at healthy and sustainable levels (GPRA) - *This measure is calculated using the number of species that are not on the FWS Birds of Management Concern List (numerator) to the List of Migratory Birds published in the Code of Federal Regulations (50 CFR § 10.13), minus the FWS Birds of Management Concern, then including the number of migratory birds species that may be harvested for sport hunting or falconry (denominator).*

The remaining metrics fall within the Division of Bird Habitat Conservation (see GPRA Measures document).

Question (for Bird Conservation Committee): What are some actions we can take to help support/expand federal migratory bird budget?

Answer (Paul Schmidt): This community should have strong and vibrant relationship with executives within USFWS, such as regional directors, who will play a big role in making budgetary decisions. Timing is critical- with internal discussions happening in summer, we need to engage USFWS executives to discuss what is important for this community re: federal budgeting at that time. The President announces a budget in February, and at that time, the audience to reach is Congress. Paul stresses the importance of building relationships.

David Cobb that the public part of the decision process is very small (see chart in presentation), so during the internal (non-public) part of the decision process, it's important to have relationships with Service employees, from ARDs upward.

Answer (Scott Yaich): Individual Committee members are encouraged to participate in legislative and budget committees; the bird community needs to look beyond its own network and understand other priorities.

Canadian Wildlife Service Update

Marie-Josée Couture, Regional Director, Québec

[View the presentation online.](#)

Discussion

Question: If one goal of the Centennial celebrations is to raise awareness of bird conservation, are there ways to measure or note outcomes?

Answers: We have information on social media shares and tweets, and we've seen some new partnerships in urban settings. Also, our three Ministers of the Environment (or equivalent) in Canada, Mexico, and US are talking about migratory birds, and the Centennial was a theme at the North American Ornithological Conference.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Updates

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

[View the presentation online.](#) Note: **download the presentation and view in PowerPoint** to see text/talking points that accompany each slide.

Partners in Flight Landbird Plan- Applications for States

Laurel Barnhill, Chief, Migratory Bird Program, USFWS Southeast Region
Ken Rosenberg, Applied Conservation Scientist, Cornell Lab of Ornithology/ABC

[View the presentation online.](#)

The Partners in Flight Landbird Plan is now [available online](#) for download. The plan shows that birds in all terrestrial inland habitats are still declining, but there is a positive response from wetlands and waterfowl after an influx of money; we should replicate this success for other groups of birds. The plan highlights continental priorities and responsibilities as well as common birds in steep decline, and presents new metrics of urgency, including “half life” measurements (how many years we have until we lose another 50% of a population). The plan engaged Joint Ventures and profiled each JV, stepping down continent-level information to a regional scale.

Request: PIF Science Committee is a stronghold of PIF and produces tools used by states and others for planning, design, delivery, and assessment. PIF seeks active participation in the science committee through either knowledge/expertise or information.

ABC-Cornell Science to Conservation Action Initiative

EJ Williams, Vice President, North American Birds and Habitats, American Bird Conservancy
Ken Rosenberg, Applied Conservation Scientist, Cornell Lab of Ornithology/ABC

[View the presentation online.](#)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the American Bird Conservancy have entered into a new partnership that bring Cornell's science and data into ABC's on the ground conservation work, especially in Latin America. This initiative has three focus areas:

1. Refining geographic focal areas- using data to quantify the most important areas on the ground and refine where we're working.
2. Monitoring and Evaluation- ABC has a system of reserves and on-the-ground reforestation projects. This partnership will bring better monitoring info to projects to evaluate success of reserves and conservation actions.
3. Conservation Birding- Many reserves have a good infrastructure for ecotourism with the energy and capacity to attract birders. Can target focus on supporting the area and conservation projects, getting birders to participate in collecting monitoring/eBird data.

Blue Ribbon Panel Update

Mark Humpert, Director of Conservation Initiatives, AFWA

The Blue Ribbon Panel, a diverse panel of business and conservation leaders, was charged with finding a sustained, dedicated funding mechanism for the full array of fish and wildlife conservation. The Panel decided that directing existing royalties and fees from development of energy/mineral on federal lands/waters is the best option; this is a \$13b fund put directly into Treasury, and the Panel would like to direct 10% (\$1.3b) to F&W conservation, which is the annual amount it would cost to effectively implement State Wildlife Action Plans. The Panel also recommended that a team convene to evaluate how we can ensure that fish and wildlife conservation remains relevant and becomes more relevant in our society.

A bill (Recovering America's Wildlife Act) was introduced into the House on July 6 that mirrors the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel, directing \$1.3b through the Wildlife Restoration Program, a permanently authorized subaccount of P-R. Note that education and fish and wildlife recreation would also be fundable through this program, and would allow states to devote up to 10% of these funds into wildlife-dependent recreation viewing structures, outreach to the birding community, etc.

Sean Saville, a former national grassroots campaign manager for National Audubon, will be the Campaign Manager for BRP.

Question: What are the biggest challenges to the success of this initiative?

Answer: 1) Offset- since this is existing revenue, rather than new money, a new allocation of spending will require a decrease in spending on something else; 2) \$1.3 billion is a lot of money (although this may help Congress recognize the scope of the problem); 3) Some groups concerned that this will spur more oil and gas development, but that is not correct; 4) Some groups are concerned that this could compete with LWCF, but there is plenty of money left for LWCF.

Southern Wings Progress Updates

Deb Hahn, International Relations Director, AFWA

[View the presentation online.](#) Note: **download the presentation and view in PowerPoint** to see text/talking points that accompany each slide.

This year, states have contributed almost \$300k towards projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 29 states engaged in Southern Wings. Southern Wings is looking to the future and exploring how to maximize their impact and link to other organizations putting money on the ground for issues such as carbon sequestration and climate change; if we get bird discussions in the mix we can help guide how that conservation is put on the ground.

The World Resources Initiative has developed a "20x20 initiative" to restore 27 million hectares of degraded land in Central and South America. It is gathering funds from private entities and looking for NGOs to help figure out where to put the money. WRI is well known and trusted, and commitments are made under a signed international bond. Southern Wings is considering whether it can bring money and technical support to that project and help guide funding and activity to areas most critical for birds. Southern Wings is looking for advice on whether it should become a partner in this initiative.

The Committee supported Southern Wings becoming a partner in WRI's 20x20 Initiative.

North America's Grasslands

Tracking Grassland Conversion

Jeff Nelson, Deputy Director, Wildlife Conservation, Northern Great Plains Program, World Wildlife Fund

[View the presentation online.](#)

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has developed a system to track grassland conversion in North America. In 2009, they evaluated landscape across the Northern Great Plains, Great Plains, and Joint Ventures (see maps) and determine what percentage is cropland, cities, open water, or intact. Each year, they track where new plowing is happening and subtract this from their intact measurement.

While the Northern Great Plains have 70% measured intact as of 2016, with JVs measuring 46% intact and Great Plains 54% intact, conversion rates are high (~1 million acres newly plowed between 2014 and 2015 across study area), especially in Canada and particularly Saskatchewan.

See slides for maps and analysis of Northern Great Plains, JV Coverage, and Great Plains conversion and fragmentation. Overall, grassland conversion is steady and losses outweigh restoration. There have been 53 million acres converted in the Great Plains since 2009, and grassland birds are in steady decline. Grassland conversion has implications for other ecosystems as well; once grasslands are converted, wetlands are easily drained. Jeff Nelson indicates that the best approach is to build relationships with the ranching community and work with them to make progress in the next Farm Bill; it is important to include provisions in the next Farm Bill to fill in marginal lands that have been converted.

Tri-National Grassland Bird Conservation

Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

[View the presentation online.](#)

Grassland birds are in steep decline and often occur at increased concentrations on wintering ground habitats, which can make these smaller areas more critical for larger percentages of a species' population. Grassland birds face numerous challenges from grassland conversion and habitat degradation from shrub encroachment, fragmentation, and climate change. Many partners are working on or have a stake in grassland bird conservation issues:

- These issues cross 6 JVs, including 2 of the lowest funded JVs.
- NFWF has a Northern Great Plains Initiative, which is convening partners to develop a transparent process on how to focus conservation efforts through a business plan.
- NABCI has historically identified grassland priority areas

Can we use the Sage Grouse Initiative and the Monarch partnership as models to create a grassland bird initiative and create grassland bird practices in the next Farm Bill? We can use NABCI Subcommittees and tri-national partnerships to support this initiative across the Western States.

Note: Discussion about grasslands continued in BCC II.