



**BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE (BCC1)**  
**Chair: Judy Camuso (Maine)**  
**Vice-Chair: Austin Booth (Arkansas)**

**Date: Tuesday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023**  
**Time: 10:00-12:00 a.m. CST**

88th North American Fish and Wildlife Conference Meeting, St. Louis (MO)  
 Room: Majestic D – Conference Center Upper Level

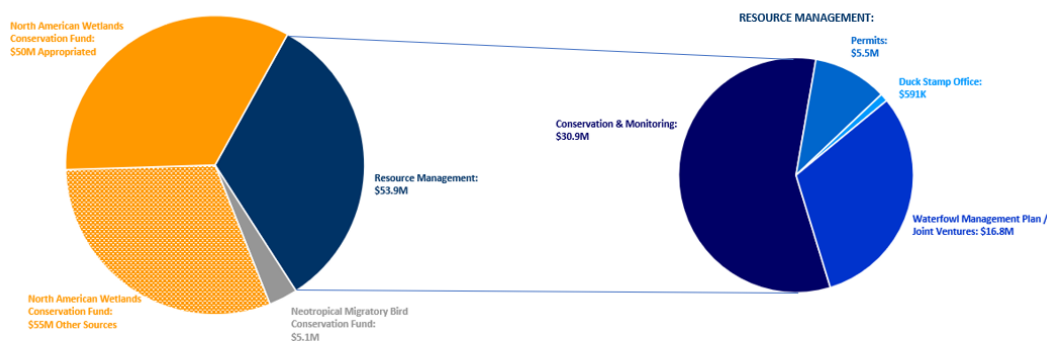
**NOTES**

**US Fish & Wildlife Service Migration Bird Program → See PowerPoint**

- *Ken Richkus, Division of Migratory Bird Management*

Ken Richkus updated the group on the President’s Budget proposal. Unfortunately, all US FWS budgets are reducing or staying flat.

**Budget – FY23 Discretionary & Mandatory Accounts**



FY23, the Migratory Bird Program's funding is \$164 million.

- Roughly two-thirds of this funding (\$110M) will be awarded as grants – mainly through North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants, but also the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grants

- The remaining \$54 million in the Resource Management account goes towards things like:
- Monitoring and evaluating game and nongame species
- Establishing annual hunting regulations
- Supporting Urban Bird Treaty cities
- Working with partners to bring birds back through voluntary conservation measures
- Issuing permits
- Conducting the Federal and Junior Duck Stamp contests
- Implementing, through various partnerships, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan

The historical trend slide shows that the budgets have been flat, which is a huge challenge. In addition to the inflation, USFWS lost about 6 million of buying power. Due to those challenges, Ken indicated they lost about 20% of positions slated for bird conservation. This is good news for the group.

In terms of recruitment, the division is looking at the followings:

- Just hired Jennifer Miller - Chief Branch of Permits and Regulation
- They will hire:
  - Coordinator, North American Waterfowl Management Plan (advertised soon)
  - Chief, Branch of Assessment and Decision Support
  - Coordinator, National Raptor Program
  - Chief, Branch of Bird Conservation
  - Coordinator, Partners in Flight (detailees)
  - Coordinator, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership (detailees)

Ken followed up the budget presentation with updates on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Eagle regulations 2.0. They are in the midst of re-imagining incidental take permitting. They have published the advanced rulemaking and are expecting the publication of the proposed rule next summer/fall of 2023

### **Migratory Bird Treaty Act:**

- The goal is to improve bird conservation, codify/clarify incidental take prohibition, and provide certainty and transparency to the public.
- They are looking at a three-tiered permitting approach for specified activities based on risk: regulatory authorizations, general permits, and specific permits.
- Pathway to compliance for individuals, Federal agencies, and non-specified activities

### **Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act**

- Will update and add new regulations to the Act to increase eagle conservation benefits. It will also simplify the eagle incidental take permitting program.
- The new rules proposed a general permit approach for certain activities that are lower risk to eagles: wind energy facilities, electric utilities, nest disturbance, nest take
- The goal is to allocate FWS resources towards projects with the most significant risk to eagles.
- Final rule – publication December 2023

### **Regulatory Authorizations**

- Proposes new and revised regulatory authorizations (50 CFR 21.12) for the possession of migratory birds and eagles

- Includes authorization for Federal, State, and Tribal wildlife agency employees  
*Status: Proposed rule – publication spring 2023*

### **Agency Species Protection**

- Take of migratory birds to protect the species currently authorized under Depredation regulation (50 CFR 21.100)
- Creates a new regulation to authorize government agencies to take migratory birds to protect species of concern, such as endangered and threatened species.
- Aims to prevent listing and support recovery of species better
- *Status: Proposed rule – publication fall 2023*

The agency is working on the final framework for the Game Bird. The framework should be published by late summer.

Ken updated the group on the Highly Pathogen Avian Influenza crisis. One of the big challenges for the agency is to continue banding without transmitting the virus. He indicated that all programs have now resumed. So the agency is continuing its birding activities. The list of the following activities was shared with the group.

- Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey, completed June 2022
- Cooperative waterfowl banding programs, completed Sept 2022
- No disruptions to banding due to HPAI. Guidance for banding during HPAI
- Western Golden Eagle Survey, completed Fall 2022
- Bald Eagle Survey, In Progress
- Harvest Surveys and Part Surveys for 2022/23, will be completed Winter 2023

The North American Wetlands Conservation Council has recommended the following for approval by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission in April.

- 12 U.S. Standard projects
- 8 Canada projects
- 9 Mexico projects

The Migratory Bird Program and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council announced significant changes to the U.S. proposals in 2024.

- Revised and streamlined the U.S. Standard grant proposal instructions to reduce redundancy and make applying easier.
- Council set a cap of \$3 million for U.S. Standard grant proposals and removed the requirement that applicants had to justify if they requested more than \$1 million.
- Council raised the cap on U.S. Small grants from \$100,000 to \$250,000 beginning in 2024. The call for Small grants proposals will be posted in August, if not before.

Finally, Ken updated the audience on the Federal Duck Stamp successes:

- More than \$1.1 billion has been raised since 1934.
- 6 million acres were conserved.
- 1.5+ million stamps were sold annually.

## Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

- *Camille Hopkins, USGS Wildlife Disease Specialist Ecosystem Mission Area*

Judy started this session by updating the audience that in her state, Maine, they are highly encouraging people not to take harvesting females. The situation is real, and we must all work together to address this crisis.

Camille started her presentation by indicating that we are in a state of spillover as the HPAI is now transmitted to mammals. She shared the USGS Mission area organizational chart. The Wildlife disease department is under the Biological Threats department.

She indicated that we have a bidirectional exchange of the pathogen right now. From domestic poultry to wild birds and vice versa. Highly pathogenic viruses in poultry can spill back into wild birds, resulting in further geographic spread (and adaptation) of the virus by migratory birds. The virus in the environment may remain infectious for extended periods. Finally, we are having a periodical spillover into mammals.

She shared that studies reveal that while we don't fully understand the persistence of the virus in the environment, field and lab studies have shown that they can remain infectious for weeks or months in environmental surface waters.

USGS representatives participate in the U.S. Interagency Steering Committee for Avian Influenza Surveillance in Wild Migratory Birds with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the National Flyway Council. In Aug 2021, they also coordinated an international HPAI and wild birds webinar series to provide North American natural resource managers and scientists with the latest updates on the global situation. The proceedings are now available online with time stamps and links to the recordings. Information on the USDA surveillance plan for HPAI in migratory birds in the United States is also available online. The goals of this surveillance effort are to maximize our ability to:

- Detect AIVs in wild waterfowl to identify the distribution of AIVs in the U.S.
- Detect spread to new areas of concern.
- Provide a flexible surveillance framework to monitor wild dabbling duck populations for the introduction of new viruses.
- Estimate the prevalence of AIVs once detected.

See: [Implementation Plan for Avian Influenza Surveillance in Waterfowl in the United States, Summer FY 2021 – Winter FY 2022 \(usda.gov\)](#)

Camille indicated that the focus for detection is on the dabbling ducks (agency- or hunter-harvested or live wild bird samples) in Atlantic and Pacific Flyways with numbers across watersheds (hydrologic unit code 4). The USGS National Wildlife Health Center has been the primary lab for wild bird morbidity and mortality surveillance. The plan worked: 1% prevalence (95% CI) in each watershed unit - successfully detecting it in wild birds before poultry.

In addition to dabbling ducks, the geese, the swans, and the diving ducks like lesser scaup have been impacted, as well as the birds of prey and scavenging birds (notably Bald Eagles and black vultures).

The seabird nesting colonies have been significantly affected – especially the Northern gannets in Canada and the Caspian terns at Lake Michigan.

Camille shared the latest map of HPAI detections in wild birds from the USDA. It shows how the virus has spread across the continental U.S. and Alaska. She also showed the maps on the detection of mammals.

The USGS has prepared a publication highlighting what natural resource managers can do. We suggest they communicate and coordinate outbreak response plans within their agency or organization first and then with external partners as appropriate. Given the potential implications of HPAI to poultry and human health, adopting a 'one health approach' in coordinating response plans across offices and agencies should be pursued. The specific actions that organizations should take include:

- Risk Analysis (e.g., whether or not to use PPE during an outbreak)
- Incident planning
- Interjurisdictional tabletop exercises
- Development of communication plans
- Development of plans for the use of PPE during an outbreak, and
- Outbreak monitoring/documentation plans

Additional considerations for managers during an outbreak of HPAI in wild birds include:

- Whether to use a decision tree to guide actions or non-actions. This is how USGS operates.
- Whether to restrict or suspend activities that aggregate birds or allow for handling of birds.
- Whether to restrict or suspend access to wetlands associated with influenza outbreaks.
- Whether to implement disinfection protocols for boats or gear used in outbreak-affected wetlands.
- Whether to manipulate water levels of small managed wetlands to facilitate faster viral inactivation (ie, through increasing U.V. penetration or raising the water temperature).

Finally, Camille recommended the group to visit the USDA/APHIS website and sign up for the NWHC Wildlife Health Bulletins to stay up-to-date on avian influenza and other wildlife diseases. Several decision-support tools have been developed for A.I., including the C.A. Waterfowl tracker to support the Central Valley by using satellite imagery and land-based climate measurements to predict waterfowl location and abundance in near real-time to inform risk assessments and A.I. surveillance.

### **Canadian Wildlife Service Update**

- *Natalie Savoie, Canadian Wildlife Service*

The Migratory Birds Regulations were published in July 2022 and will be effective on July 31st, 2023. There are, in addition, efforts underway to address:

- Public safety emergencies, animal welfare, and hazing

As FWS, the agency is looking at a new incidental take permitting process. They are starting to consult with different sectors, NGOs, and Federal partners.

As in the US, Canada is impacted by the HPAI virus. It has been detected in all provinces and territories. Over 7 million domestic birds and over 45 million wild birds have died. It peaked in April and May of last year, which was the breeding season, then again in Fall, which coincided with the migration of

young birds. They expect another resurgence of cases as the birds are migrating across North America Flyways.

So what is the agency doing? They are working towards a lot of cooperation and surveillance. In addition, the agency is asking for voluntary reduction of eider harvest – this is happening in New Brunswick, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. In the Gulf of St. Lawrence, HPAI caused 5 to 15% of mortality among the Common Eider. They are also approaching the crisis with the One Health consideration.

The agency has implemented new ECCC (**Environment and Climate Change Canada**) actions to meet its mandates for protecting Migratory birds in Canada.

The agency is also working on a cross-border collaboration. Natalie indicated that 78% of Canadian birds spend over half the year outside Canada. In particular, the agency is aiming towards:

- Sharing information at various fora (e.g., Trilateral Committee, World Organization for Animal Health)
- Enhancing situational awareness in wildlife and ecosystem health through engagement in One Health initiatives with the Quadripartite organizations
- Participating and providing expertise in the North American Plan for Animal and Pandemic Influenza (NAPAPI) health security working group

### **U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative**

*Judy Camuso –Commissioner, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*

Judy announced the recruitment of the NABCI program coordinator, Bradley Wilkerson, who will be coming on board on April 3rd, 2023.

### **Road to Recovery (R2R)**

*Tammy VerCauteren, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies*

Tammy shared that the recent efforts to address the loss of 3 billion birds come when we might also see unprecedented investment in resources to manage nongame wildlife, especially within the states and the RAWA funding.

The Road to Recovery has operated with a core staff and Leadership Team for about a year. They have been making important strides in developing a new bird conservation paradigm that integrates several key disciplines in developing science to address conservation actions to RECOVER species strategically.

She shared the devastating loss, especially for the grassland (more than 50%) and the boreal forests, which have been losing about one-third of the birds' populations. She indicated that we had seen many advances, but unfortunately, the successes are still very much species-dependent.

The Road to Recovery program aims at 3 main goals:

- Develop a process (and garner the resources necessary to support that process) for sustainable species recovery – starting with Tipping Point species.

- Promote targeted and actionable science (including both biological and social science) to recover bird populations.
- Increase efficiency and effectiveness of implementation (by eliminating the gap between science and implementation).

The species on this R2R list are not a surprise. They are the same groups that the PIF has focused on since the beginning – but now, within each of these habitat groups, we've identified the set of species with the highest urgency.

We are also looking at the situation internationally.

- The group is starting a pilot with three species of focus which will be the attention of separate workgroups. The species include the Lesser Yellow Leg, the evening grosbeak and the
- The goal is to show a proof of concept –these groups can use an infusion of funding and support to do the necessary research to advance the species along the steps to recovery.

### **Central Grassland Roadmap**

*Tammy VerCauteren, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies*

Tammy shared the Central Grassland roadmap work effort. They are working at a biome scale to elevate the issues grasslands face. Tammy shared that we are losing 4 million grasslands a year. 2 of the 4 are just from trees and encroachment issues. As she stated, what we do in the next ten years will define what will happen in the future.

From her perspective, we must reunite the grassland core with the wildlife and the community's will. People will determine what our landscape is going to be. Communities need to be at the core of the debate! In bird conservation, we've historically focused on efforts to save a specific or group of birds. While the intentions were wonderful, we functionally created borders between bird species, between the birds and the management of the habitats they depend on, and even between those habitats and the people who connected to them. She indicated that we need to change our approach.

We must shift from protecting individual bird species to conserving entire landscapes; shift our thinking from silos of birds, places, and people to bring them all together into our work. Socio-ecologically there is the interconnectivity of humans as part of the ecosystem. We need to honor the land stewardship mindset and the Indigenous ways (human-nonhuman relatives) of living with nature.

The Central Grassland Roadmap is a paradigm shift focusing on four key strategies, including

- working across three countries and multiple nations,
- elevating and inviting Indigenous voices at the onset,
- bringing together seven sectors from private landowners to industry,
- focusing on grasslands first versus certain species or certain groups

Tammy indicated that the JV8 has been helping on the funding side. She inquired whether they should join that group.

The grassland has been working with the Motus project. They have 32 stations, and 26 more will be added in 2023. These towers have helped us understand the birds' movements within a season which is crucial. They have deployed tags on more than 190 target grassland species, including 71 on Chestnut-collared and Thick-billed Longspurs, 65 on Grasshopper Sparrow, and 44 on Baird's Sparrows.

The plan is to deploy another 200 more this coming winter.

There are still geographical gaps that need to be filled. States are utilizing the Competitive State Wildlife Grants (cSWG), the Pittman Robertson (P.R.) money, new taxes (Montana Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act – I-190), and other state funding available to develop the Motus network at the state level. The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies has expertise in Motus and coordinates across much of the continent's western half. USFWS and other agencies also develop Motus on their managed lands (National Wildlife Refuges, DoD bases, etc.). The state of Montana plans to add 50 tours across the state

By working with WWF and UNL Dirac, the group now has an updated Grassland Assessment map to include plow print data from 2020. They also have better specificity for trees and shrubs and thresholds for encroachment. The new map also worked across Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, including desert/shrub maps. To see the latest version of the map, please refer to [The+Central+Grasslands+Roadmap+Summit+Update+6+20+22.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

We are losing 4 million acres a year. We want to affect 10 million acres. We need to get a grassland assessment map. This may take at least 10 years. In the yellow zone, we must address issues such as invading trees and shrubs. In the purple zone, the areas converted need to be put back. The blue areas are the core areas. In those areas, the populations are increasing.

A new committee within the roadmap is being established to focus on the bird community recovery efforts. They will focus on specific bird species to provide priority landscape focus needs. If anyone is interested in joining this group, please let Tammy know.

Tammy indicated that they have now:

- Story Map
- Communications Toolkits
- Briefings
- NAGCA and RAWA
- LOI-Trinational

The next set of actions includes:

- Hiring a Central Grassland Director CGR
- Working on integration of the data –birds data sets, social sciences... However, they need access to Canadian and Mexico information. They also need to dedicate time to the indigenous community.
- Build capacity for social sciences.
  - Yield success for American the Beautiful Funding.
  - The roadmap is in the final stages of hiring a coordinator who can help.
- We need to take the conversation on the road!!! Roadmap Roadshow

### **Partners in Flight (PIF) Update è NO PPT**

- *John Alexander, Klamath Bird Observatory*



While the PIF group does not have a chair or cochair, they meet regularly. They have reviewed the strategic plan – 72% of the objectives are completed, and the remainder is partially completed. They wish to increase capacity by partnering with JV8.

The group did a gap analysis. The findings are the followings:

- They need to continue working on social sciences inclusion.
- They understand the value of community and diversity inclusion. They wish to strengthen the production of findings with the communities.
- They wish to establish a multinational partnership.
- For capacity building, they identify the need to collaborate through learning experiences.

PIF is a true workgroup.

- On the West side, they worked on the Western Forest Project, the Desert Thrasher, the Pinion Jay, the Western hummingbirds, and Conservation without borders.
- On the East, they worked with the Eastern Grassland.
- On the International side, they work on developing a non-breeding assessment score.

### **Avian Knowledge Network Update**

- *John Alexander, Klamath Bird Observatory*

The Avian Knowledge is a central repository. The DOD has just agreed to use the AKN for their bird data. John indicated that the domain is losing data by not safeguarding them. For instance, John shared that they just recovered 1 million records from the US Forest Service. The tools were mainly developed for the Western region. However, they are now moving to incorporate data from the East. The AKN is different from eBird from Cornell. It contains more comprehensive data. For details on the AKN, please refer to the presentation.

**Action items: NONE**