



**Migratory Bird Joint Ventures
Update for the Bird Conservation
Committee
83rd North American Wildlife and
Natural Resources Conference
March 2018**

Following are a series of summary updates submitted by several of the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures (JVs) highlighting their bird conservation efforts, with emphasis on state agency partnerships. Note that this should not be considered an exhaustive list of all JV-state agency partnerships, but rather a small subset of the many ways JVs are collaborating with state agencies to more effectively address shared priorities.



Todd Fearer, Coordinator
540-231-9519
tfearer@abcbirds.org

The Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture (AMJV), through its Focal Landscapes Initiative, is working to establish a more diverse forest system in the Appalachians that provides for the full range of breeding season needs of species across major forest types and all seral stages. The overarching goal of this initiative is to focus limited capacity and resources in discrete locations in order to work across public and private lands and enhance forest structure and species diversity. Each Focal Landscape is being considered as a holistic system, and these efforts are intended to meet a suite of complimentary objectives, including forest health, resilience, and wildlife. The development of each focal landscape is very bottom-up, partner driven process that integrates state and local level priorities, especially the State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs). In West Virginia, for example, we adopted the WV DNR Conservation Focus Areas (CFA) identified in their SWAP to delineate a large portion of this focal landscape boundary. We then used the priorities identified for the CFAs in the WV SWAP to inform the initial set of ecological priorities of this Focal Landscape.

Because of the holistic approach we are taking with our landscape-level conservation planning, we are including priorities that are not necessarily bird-centric, but still have overlapping benefits to priority bird species. Not only does this support the priorities of and encourage greater engagement from our state partners, but it also facilitates acquisition of funding and resources for work on the ground. In this case, these ecological priorities aligned with those established by NFWF for the recently developed Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program. The

framework established by our focal landscapes allowed several AMJV partners to quickly develop and submit multiple proposals to this NFWF program, resulting in 5 funded projects and over \$1.2 million in grant and matching funds directed towards our Focal Landscape efforts.



Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

Aimee Weldon, Coordinator
413-253-8407
Aimee_weldon@fws.gov

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is working with several states as part of their Saltmarsh Sparrow Working Group to develop a habitat prioritization tool for Saltmarsh Sparrows. Saltmarsh Sparrows have been declining by 9% per year and are an SCGN in 13 of the 16 states within the ACJV region. Version 1 of the tool, which is currently in draft form, focuses on identifying and prioritizing the most important patches for sustaining Saltmarsh Sparrow populations.



Central Hardwoods Joint Venture *partnerships for conservation*

Jane Fitzgerald, Coordinator
417-231-2994
jfitzgerald@abcbirds.org

The Central Hardwoods Joint Venture has several projects with state partners. They led the effort to develop a successful project funded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program that will put over 7,500 acres of grassland bird habitat on the ground in Kentucky and Tennessee. CHJV staff are working with Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and regional planners in northwest Arkansas to implement grassland bird habitat conservation and efforts there. The CHJV continues to work with partners in Illinois and Kentucky on a multi-state State Wildlife Grant initiated with The Nature Conservancy to increase prescribed fire work benefitting native grassland habitat. Targeted to improve habitat for the Rattlesnake Master Borer moth, an endemic species which relies exclusively on the Rattlesnake Master plant, funding is being used to build capacity of all agencies and several NGOs in the state to address needed burns on important grassland and open woodlands in the region.



Catherine Rideout, Coordinator
404-679-7091
Catherine_Rideout@fws.gov

The National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) has developed the Coordinated Implementation Program to provide a framework for largescale habitat management and monitoring used to measure restoration success for grassland birds in the states. The program includes identification of focal and reference areas, habitat management, and implementation of monitoring protocols for Northern Bobwhite and grassland birds. East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture staff member Rob Holbrook worked with Professor Dr. Phil Darby at the University of West Florida to develop a process for students to assist. Joint Venture partners from US Forest Service and Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources convened, and students were identified and trained for this effort. While playing a significant role in the project, the students are, in turn, receiving an important training opportunity for population and habitat monitoring, which is a win-win for all involved.



Keith McKnight, Coordinator
903-363-8365
Steven_mcknight@fws.gov

The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) has developed a series of Conservation Delivery Networks (CDNs) to provide a central, valuable nexus for state agency and other partner staff to communicate and coordinate habitat conservation efforts for maximum effectiveness and efficiency within sub geographies of the LMVJV. The majority of CDNs are chaired by state wildlife agency staff. A highlight for Winter/Spring 2018 is awarding of funds for a second year of the Northeast Texas CDN Habitat Incentive Program. Funds for this effort are provided by Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and Partners for Fish & Wildlife, project selection by the CDN Steering Committee, agreements managed by the National Wild Turkey Federation, program coordination by LMVJV staff, and projects developed and accomplished through collaboration between agency private lands staff and the landowner. To date, \$239,409 has been expended or approved for direct landowner reimbursement, impacting 2,564 acres in priority bird landscapes.



Daniel Casey, Coordinator
406-702-1944
dcasey@ducks.org

The Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) comprises an area of 68 counties in the four states of Montana, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming. Our current priorities are focused on working grasslands and stemming declines of declining landbirds identified as Watch List species by PIF and/or as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in multiple State Wildlife Action Plans. These are the Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspur, Lark Bunting, and Sprague's Pipit. Three of our four states sit on our Management Board, and all four are represented in our Technical Committee. We have developed a "Conservation Guidance Directory" that serves as a tool for conservation design and decision support tool enumerating priority areas for grassland restoration, enhancement and protection on a county by county basis across the NGPJV geography. This tool combines core area models for these five grassland species with a "plowprint" analysis that identifies intact grassland, perennial cover in previously plowed areas, and annual cropland in addition to measures of conversion risk. We disseminate this information through a "Conservation Delivery Network" of partner biologists, including private lands biologists in each of the four states, to enhance conservation delivery. We are also implementing a new "Working Prairies" program through NRCS in 2018 to target Farm Bill delivery to priority grassland areas in the Dakotas, with plans to expand it to Montana and Wyoming in future years.



Jim Giocomo, Coordinator
254-654-7790
jgiocomo@abcbirds.org



Barry Wilson, Coordinator
337-266-8815
barry_wilson@fws.gov



Aimee Roberson, Coordinator
432-924-2026
aroberson@abcbirds.org

The Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture (OPJV) partnerships' Grassland Restoration Incentive Program (GRIP) is a multi-organization effort aimed at achieving OPJV grassland bird objectives in focus areas throughout Texas. GRIP provides funding in the form of direct payment to landowners as an incentive for conducting approved grassland bird habitat improvement practices on their property. Project proposals are prepared and submitted in coordination with local Texas Parks & Wildlife Department staff or other OPJV partner

organization personnel. Approved projects will meet eligibility requirements established by OPJV local initiative teams. Payments are made to landowners for approved practices after completion of work is certified by coordinating partner organization staff. Since 2013, over \$1 million of incentives paid to landowners for 70,000 acres of conservation projects in focal counties using existing staff from partner organizations and agencies.

At its December 2017 board meeting, the Gulf Coast Joint Venture (GCJV) decided to pursue development of a new grassland habitat delivery program tailored to private lands and modeled after the OPJV GRIP. This GCJV GRIP will be highly dependent on, and highly complementary to, state agency biologists and their emphases on private lands. The Rio Grande Joint Venture also is adopting and expanding GRIP into four southwestern Texas counties.



Mike Carter, Coordinator
303-926-0777
mike.carter@pljv.org

Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) is working with many partners, including our management board, to fund the Integrated Bird Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program across our six states. The important work of implementation is executed by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, also a board member. This program, IMBCR for PLJV, provides much-needed, scientifically defensible estimates of bird distribution and abundance across large regions that can be used by conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, and energy companies to target and evaluate habitat projects throughout the region. The program is funded by regional and national partners, including state agencies. While the total annual cost of the program is just under \$400,000, PLJV has established a unique funding mechanism that keeps individual state contributions less than \$30,000. In this way, no one entity bears a high burden of the financial cost, and if one entity has budget problems, the entire program will not collapse for lack of funding. The result is a state-of-the-art monitoring framework that addresses the conservation and management needs of state agencies and other stakeholders in the PLJV. Monitoring protocols are managed to help partners collect data under a consistent framework, and partners meet annually to discuss program outcomes. (See attached flyer for more information)



Prairie Pothole
Joint Venture

Casey Stemler, Coordinator
303-236-4412
Casey_stemler@fws.gov

The Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV) recently completed an update of their Implementation Plan, and for the first time in its over 30-year history they included State Tactical Plans stepping down habitat goals from the Implementation Plan to each individual state level. The Tactical Plans were developed by state-based teams consisting of the respective fish and game agency

and conservation partners within the state. Beyond habitat goals, the Tactical Plans also addresses priority action items and goals for conservation policy and legislation. Additionally, the Plans explicitly recognize the human user component of bird conservation and this is accomplished through objectives and strategies regarding public access to wetland and upland resources in an effort to maintain the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region migratory bird hunter constituency and associated financial and political support for bird conservation.



Andy Bishop
308-380-8691
Andy-bishop@fws.gov

Nebraska's Sandhills are the largest intact grass stabilized dune system in North America. This region is approximately 97% privately owned and finding those "win-win" situations for requires conservation programs that are both good for the bird and the ranchers bottom-line. Control of eastern red cedar is one of those conservation practices that provides to distinct benefit for both grassland birds and the ranchers. This is because many grassland birds are area sensitive and will abandon an area when trees are present, even at relatively low densities (1- 2 trees per acre). Control of eastern red cedar also benefits the ranch operation because of increased forage production. To address these resource concerns, Nebraska Cattlemen worked with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Pheasants Forever, Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, Sandhills Task Force, The Nature Conservancy, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to develop a Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) proposal. This proposal focused on control of eastern red cedar in the eastern Sandhills.

In the initial WLFW application period, NRCS staff and conservation partners worked with 10 ranchers to develop conservation plans for their ranches. Each plan focused on implementing conservation practices that improved the ranch operation and habitat conditions. Many of the conservation plans include grazing system, modifications to infrastructure to promote wildlife friendly grazing practices, and mechanical removal of eastern red cedar as well as integration of prescribed fire to control its re-infestation. The conservation plans provide road maps for use of a suite of conservation practices to meet natural resource and production goals. Cost-share through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial assistance to ranchers to implement the practices outlined in the conservation plans. The WLFW Initiative provides a special allocation of EQIP funds for these conservation practices in the Sandhills. The previously mentioned partners also provided cost-share. For most projects, the partner and EQIP cost-share cover 75% of the costs of the conservation practices implemented, with the landowner contributing the additional 25%. The conservation plans and associated practices will positively impact 13,485 acres once all of the practices are implemented. In total \$466,990 of EQIP and partner funds were leveraged to implement these projects. NRCS is now accepting applications for the 2018 WLFW application period. There has already been significant interest WLFW with 15 applications already submitted to NCRS county field offices.



PLAYA LAKES

JOINT VENTURE



How It Works

- PLJV acts as a broker—managing the partner funding and contracts.
- Bird Conservancy of the Rockies executes most aspects of the IMBCR program—from hiring and training high-quality field workers to posting summary results.
- IMBCR for PLJV is part of the larger program which provides estimates of regional bird distribution and abundance across 12 western states.
- Program cost for the PLJV region is spread among many partners.
- Surveys are conducted everywhere birds are found.
- Sample sites are randomly selected.
- Sampling design addresses the needs of a broad range of stakeholders.
- Data are applicable at local and regional scales.
- Density and occupancy estimates help partners target and evaluate.

IMBCR for PLJV providing region-wide bird data

Why Count Birds?

Many species of grassland birds unique to the western Great Plains are in steep decline. To better understand the causes of these declines, we need information about the distribution, abundance, and habitat that the species use across their range. This information helps conservation partners understand how to best manage wildlife populations and where to target conservation actions to reverse species declines. For example, we can demonstrate how ranchers can maintain habitat to support birds and work with them to improve habitat. Unfortunately, large-scale, long-term surveys of landbirds, that are needed to address landscape-level conservation are difficult to implement. They require deploying large, highly-trained field crews to survey locations across a wide landscape during a short window in early spring.

A Collaborative Solution

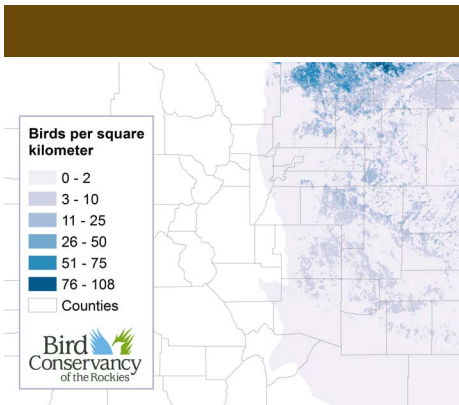
To address these challenges, Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) is working with many partners, including our management board, to fund the

Integrated Bird Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program across our six states. The important work of implementation is executed by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, also a board member. This program, IMBCR for PLJV, provides much-needed, scientifically defensible estimates of bird distribution and abundance across large regions that can be used by conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, and energy companies to target and evaluate habitat projects throughout the region.

In 2015, to disperse costs and secure the stability of the program, we began developing a large partnership of entities that can use high-quality bird data. In this way, no one entity bears a high burden of the financial cost, and if one entity has budget problems, the entire program will not collapse for lack of funding. We envision all partners contributing a portion of the necessary funding and committing to agreements for three to ten years. Our goal is to have so many partners that financial commitments by individual partners are significantly below expected proportional costs.

bird data collection

informing bird and habitat conservation

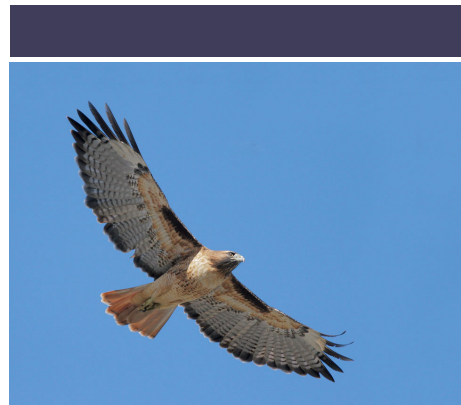


Data Applications

During the 2016 field season, 220 bird species were detected in the PLJV region, of which 130 are on the PLJV watch list. There were 18 species for which we can complete density and occupancy estimates and 12 additional species for which we can complete occupancy estimates.

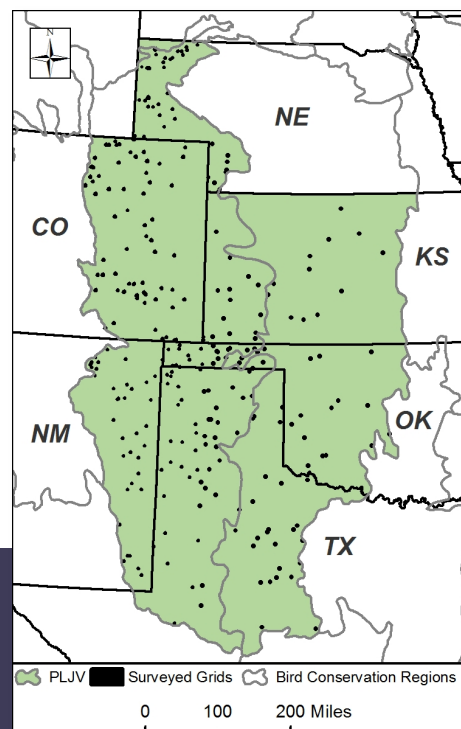
The IMBCR data will allow us to create:

- Distribution maps and population estimates that are useful in all aspects of bird conservation;
- Habitat modeling that provides land managers with information needed to guide conservation efforts, such as preferred local habitat conditions to inform managers on “what to do” when managing habitat.
- GIS data that can be paired with bird data to guide landscape-level planning;
- Habitat models that can be used to create predictive distribution maps which will inform long-term conservation planning and habitat projects.



Program Deliverables

The state-of-the-art sampling design of IMBCR addresses the conservation and management needs of a broad range of stakeholders, including government entities and private industries at both local and regional scales. Protocols are managed to help partners collect data under a consistent framework, and partners meet annually to discuss program outcomes. An annual accomplishments report, including density and occupancy estimates at both local and regional scales, is also provided.



Current Funding

Coordinated data collection throughout the six PLJV states (337 sample grids) began in 2016. The total annual cost of the program is about \$384,000: \$351,000 for sampling plus \$33,000 for GIS modeling to inform habitat conservation. The program is funded through 2017 by regional and national partners, including Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, New Mexico Dept. of Game & Fish, Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation, Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept., USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Forest Service, and Great Plains Landscape Conservation Cooperative (US Fish & Wildlife Service, USFWS). The Migratory Bird Program (Southwest Region, USFWS) provides funding to support PLJV's work on this program.

Photo Credits

Front (top left to bottom right): Wind Energy by PLJV. Lark Bunting by Tom Benson. Swainson's Hawk by Tom Grey. Data Collection by PLJV. Shortgrass Prairie by PLJV. Back (left to right): McCown's Longspur Density Map. Red-tailed Hawk and Upland Sandpiper by Tom Grey.

Playa Lakes Joint Venture

2675 North Park Drive
Lafayette, CO 80026
303.926.0777

pljv.org/IMBCR