Migratory Shore and Upland Bird Meeting

North American Wildlife and Natural Resource Conference

3/9/17, Meeting Room 3

Dave Morrison called meeting to order at 1:02 pm

The new Chair is Randy Myers (Louisiana), but was unable to make this meeting because of jury duty. The Vice-chair (Dave Morrison) conducted the meeting.

Introductions were made with 26 people in attendance. (A copy of the sign-in sheet is attached)

The USFWS update was delayed because Brad Bortner had a conflict.

**HIP Working Group Update – Dave Morrison**

The group met on Tuesday afternoon. This group was formed to identify existing problems with the Harvest Information Program which is the tool to gather information on hunters, harvest, and hunting activity. Recently, there have been some serious problems with the information submitted to the USFWS which drives the harvest estimates and ultimately populations estimates for the Service.

For example, Texas issued close to 1 million HIP certifications when they only have about 450,000 migratory bird hunters. To address the this problem, the USFWS has to over-sample Texas to get reasonable estimates based on over registration.

HIP was first reviewed in the mid 2000s, with recommendations to address problems. However no changes were implemented as a result of this review. A new HIP working group was established by the Bird Conservation Committee and 5 problems identified from the first review and one addition suggestion are the basis for the current review. A national HIP program is one possible solution that would standardize all state processes. The HIP working group is trying to flesh out details. The National Dove Task Force generated a document describing a possible program to address this, and the HIP Working Group is reviewing this proposal.

This proposals considers HIP certification only via on-line or phone registration so the hunter is the person responding to the questions. After discussion at the HIPWG it was decided to convene a smaller group to review the National Dove Task Force proposal and determine if there are fatal flaws and the possibility of moving forward with a new process. There are some issues to work through because there are so many different ways the states gather HIP registration. The group will also looking at the number and nature of the questions. Based on work by Dave Otis, there may be a way to streamline the question to get reliable information. The HIP Working Group will continue to work toward a recommendation to AFWA and the MSUGB committee for an improved process for HIP registrations, sampling, and thus more reliable estimates.

Numerous questions were entertained regarding various aspects of the proposal including the number of on line registrations and it appears the number are increasing. Texas provided an example of how this type of problem can be addressed. Sandhill crane permits are required to serve as a sampling unit for sandhill crane harvest. Because they were free, Texas issued over 100,000 annually. Texas went to on-line or in-person in offices, and the number dropped to about 10,000, and solved the problem. This is why the NDTF proposal has merit to address the over registration for HIP.

Nebraska has about 15% licenses are sold on-line. They also have an option to do it over the phone. Contract prices are falling to monitor the phone lines. We also have problems getting information from the vendors, so it was necessary to go to on-line sales. This is not to cut out the retailers, but to better their sampling effort they chose the on-line method.

In Wisconsin, 27% of deer and 17% of all hunters bought licenses on-line, and this was the first year that was offered.

KY is a good example of a state that made a change to HIP registration and solved their problems. They used an education campaign, law enforcement participation, and had very good success. So this is something that will work.

It is anticipated that menbers of the NDTF will also be part of the small working group to address on-line registration. We are open to any comments, questions, criticisms, because we want to get HIP sampling corrected.

**Woodcock Task Force Update Priority Tasks and Future Directions – Jim Kelley**

Jim Kelly provide a Power Point related to the Woodcock Task Force (Attached).

The Task Force’s objectives were to 1) reverse population decline and early-successional habitat by 2012, and 2) achieve positive growth in habitat and populations by 2022. The short-term goal was actually accomplished but the long-term goal is still established for 2022.

Should this task force get involved in harvest management? Ronny George specifically excluded that from the initial task force charge. Harvest management is best left to the Flyways.

Lifespan of the Task Force? Conservation Plan is developed and implemented, but working with agencies and NGO’s to promote habitat work is ongoing. So the Task Force still has a role, and should remain intact as some kind of entity.

The Woodcock Task Force is interested in requesting from the Bird Conservation Committee to seek a new status as the Woodcock and Young Forest/Shrubland Working Group. It is important to keep woodcock in the name because it maintains the connection to the hunter, but this group recognizes that many other species benefit from these habitats.

The Mission of new Working Group would be to promote habitat management initiatives that foster an increase or maintenance of young forest/shrubland habitat that benefits woodcock and a wide variety of species.

Judith Scarl asked if there are tasks you can’t get accomplished through existing groups, like this one.

Jim Kelly countered with the questions if there could be subcommittees with working groups with a response that committees can have sub-committees, but those are supposed to be short-lived. The woodcock task force want to continue and would like guidance as to how to proceed.

The Vice Chair agreed to bring the idea of a Woodcock and Young Forest/Shrubland Working Group before the BCC. Regardless of the outcome, this group needs to a forum to bring continue working with woodcock management as the focus. Additionally this group only meets at the March meeting. Judith suggested that any new group would be less burdensome if it met outside of the existing North American because of the numerous conflicts and the total number of meetings. There are groups that don’t have face-to-face meetings. Jim countered that it would be a shame not to meet here with all the other groups like the Flyway Councils and waterfowl working groups.

A Woodcock Symposium is coming up this fall. See the minutes of the Task Force meeting that Jim passed out.

**Dove Task Force – Rich Schultheis**

A Power Point presentation was provided with a variety of topics. One was the need for a dove reward band project as an alternative for estimating dove abundance and populations. With loss of call center, we need reward band study to estimate reporting rates. Mark Seamans authored a proposal, it was introduced at EMU, CMU, and WMU, and expect recommendations from Fall Flyway meetings.

Study has to be funded through states, 3 years of bands with additional years of recoveries, samples sizes determined by desired precision in abundance estimates, and would start in 2019.

For future management we need an alternative methods for estimating abundance and this was a request of the SRC. Currently we rely on a data stream that require harvest data. In the unlike situation that we had a closed dove season, there is no mechanism to reopen if there is no harvest data to develop population estimates (Lincoln Peterson). Shaun Oldenburger is coordinating a nationwide call count with distance sampling. Based on the first two years of data collection, this is a promising approach and 2017 will likely be the last year of the survey. The question was asked if the Distance Sampling tracks our this track our current estimates that rely on dove banding? Data at this time has not been analyzed so we are uncertain but we are continuing to work through this alternative method.

A second method is a capture/recapture analysis. Mark Seamans looked at this in KS and KY, and this also shows promising but it is still early in development and depends on maintaining the banding effort. This would be the second alternative if harvest is discontinued.

Mourning Dove Harvest Strategy:

A letter has been submitted to Bortner in response to SRC comments on changes to the Dove Harvest Strategy.

It is not the Task Force role to comment on the harvest strategy, but every year changes are requested, so they think about a limited time (every 3 years) for requests to change the strategy is a prudent approach. They also encourage the use of best available science to justify changes.

Dave Otis provided update on his work on HIP stratification. Had long discussion on HIP, the impacts on estimates of dove abundance, and solutions going forward. These discussions resulted in the report that was discussed at the HIP meeting on Tuesday. Recommended a standardized website registration framework, and want to consider changes to the stratification.

It is believed that using this format he errors associated with vendors, minimize over-sampling, eliminate delays with HIP submission by states will help reduce errors in estimates of harvest which affect abundance estimates for doves.

Priority Information Needs Updates:

This document is being updated for dove and issues have been addressed in current document. The process for updating this document is not understood, however the Dove Task Force will begin that update process at the Task Force meeting next fall.

**Status of Webless Funding:**

It’s been a long time since we looked at the priority list for webless species (purple book), so is it time to update a priority information needs document? It would not be an easy undertaking to update that purple book.

Tom Cooper – there was an e-mail discussion about the development of a priority needs document rather than the list in the purple book. With the implementation of the Priority Information Needs Document and associated updates (like the crane plan), the need for revision of the purple book may not be warranted.

Richkus – we’ve been looking at some of the priority needs documents (doves, cranes), and it was my understanding that these updates negate the need for the purple book.

Cooper – we kind of did that. They were put together and given to the Flyways, so I’m not sure how much is necessary. When we first did that we got a flush of new money that has since slipped away, but we checked a lot of the boxes in certain priority needs documents. I don’t know that we have the funding to move this forward like we did back then.

Cooper – we are posting any new information on the webless website with Becky Rau (?)

Would a halfway measure would be to see what has been done to address the priority needs documents and see if anything new has come up?

Cooper – Accomplished tasks have been gathered.

Richkus: We did some good things with the available funding, but the source of that funding has declined. USFWS is still under continuing resolution until April 2018, and the uncertainty in federal funding is very high. Thus, there isn’t much chance to increase the webless funding and they are going to keep the $50,000 in the budget (down from $350,000 in the past). They did fund 2 projects with existing funding. Without some budget direction, he can’t specify what can be done regarding funding.

**USFWS Update – Ken Richkus for Brad Bortner**

Kathy Fleming is Harvest Surveys Chief; Pat Devers is PHAB Chief; Eric Kershner is Permits Chief.

Under a complete hiring freeze, and they still have holes in their programs (from recent Chief hires).

Migratory Bird Program is going through a strategic planning exercise, which hasn’t been done since 2004 and that document was intended for use through 2014. So this is a big effort, and a contractor, Global Solutions, is soliciting feedback from partners to inform that process. States, NGO’s, and other partners are being contacted for surveys and interviews to get some feedback on what they see as the Migratory Bird Program priorities. We want some honest input.

**Discussion:**

Jim Dubovsky – back to the priority needs documents for webless species. As we embark on these updates, the groups that put those initial documents together are no longer supported by AFWA. So is there any issue with those groups moving forward using the original AFWA documents and calling it an update of those documents. I want AFWA to consider this process.

Judith – would those updated documents come back here for approval?

Jim D. – that was not done with the crane plan.

Dave Scott – The Task force that did those priority needs documents was under this working group, but have been disbanded. So we could revitalize those groups from this group and move forward.

Dave Morrison – since that wasn’t done with cranes, does that need to be done with these other species. So maybe I should ask the Bird Conservation Committee if they would approve of this Working Group deciding what needs to be done and go forward to approve updated priority needs documents.

Cooper – Each group came back to this group, and then the group was dissolved.

Jim K – but did the Mig bird conservation committee dissolve it? Do they know it’s dissolved?

Judith – I don’t think there would be any problem with reforming those task forces to update the priority needs documents.

There was discussion about the AFWA protocol about getting these documents updated.

Dave – I will bring this up tomorrow by commenting that we would like the crane task force, dove task force, woodcock task force, and other groups to update the priority needs documents and bring them back to this group (Mig Shore and Upland Bird Working Group) with those updates. Then we will see if there are any objections.

Cooper – it could be that not all of them need updated. Mark Seamans could do a quick review to see which need to be updated.

Dave – If there are no other issues, the meeting was adjourned.