



## **WATERFOWL WORKING GROUP**

Chair: Jeff Ver Steeg (CPW);  
Vice Chair: Craig LeSchack (DU)

Thursday, March 7, 2019; 8:00 AM–12:00 PM  
Governor's Square 15 / Sheraton Denver Downtown, Denver, CO  
North American Wildlife & Natural Resources Conference 2019

### **Meeting Notes**

#### **Welcome / Introductions—Jeff Ver Steeg**

- Approximately 45 people attended the meeting and participated in discussions

#### **2019 Work Plan Highlights—Craig LeSchack, DU**

- Guidance document prepared by USFWS for Use of PR Funds for NAWMP Projects in Canada and DU Inc. and North Carolina have the first agreement in place to use WSFR funds.
- With the encouragement of the WWG, AFWA President sent a letter to the USDA expressing the immediate urgency that NRCS take appropriate action to resume use of current, technically rigorous methods for wetland determination; ensure intent of Swampbuster is implemented and public benefits of wetlands are retained; and provide a commitment to use appropriate data necessary to accurately delineate wetlands.
- Continued efforts to develop new brand for State Contributions to Canada program.
- Continued on-going information sharing, especially related to implementation of NAWMP and the 2012 Revision, human dimensions studies, and the release of the 2018 Update

#### **Playas Recharging Communities—Matt Smith, KDWPT**

- Survey of landowners in 2006 and the Ogallala Aquifer was the issue that rose to the top
- Local champions were key and were the real leaders in terms of explaining the aquifer issues
- Local residents had identified their priorities and really understood the need to eliminate some irrigation, manage surface water, etc.
- Mayor of Clovis behind the effort, and the city has a Water Assurance Plan that includes \$3.5M as grants for playa conservation – in addition to receiving a NFWF Resilient Communities Grant
- Joint Venture and Mayor signed proclamation of their partnership for conservation
- There are 56 other towns just like Clovis that are also sitting on the aquifer, and perhaps Clovis can be a model exported to others. Thus they have sent a package to 5 towns in Kansas, including letter from the Mayor of Clovis – some responded with: what to do you want? Others had some resources to act but some didn't. Leoti, in Wichita County, had a very favorable response.
- WOTUS – proposes elimination of federal protection, including Playas. There is some interest in putting easements on playas but JV has not looked at regulatory options in detail.

**NAWMP Plan Committee Update—Jerome Ford, USFWS / Silke Neve, CWS**

- The funding model for NAWMP is going to be that we need money from the waterfowl community to continue to implement specific elements of the plan and that the partnerships will always work to improve NAWMP
- The Plan Committees priority actions for the next two years were outlined and will focus on Leadership & Planning; Integration, Performance Evaluation and Reporting, Funding Resources, and Communications
- As the PC moves forward, it will reach out at AFWA and other venues to seek input on future priority actions
- There is a new NAWMP/NAWCA Communication Committee that is just beginning to identify means to increase communications about NAWMP
- Performance measures are important to be able to tell the public what the milestones and achievements are, and the PC will work toward identifying common measures for the Plan
- In terms of “revising” the Plan Objectives, it didn’t make sense to revise objectives for 2018, but the Plan Committee will establish a process for regular reviews and determination of if/when objectives should be updated – this will be an open and transparent discussion.

**NAWMP - HDWG/PET/R3—David Cobb, NCWRC**

- The HDWG-PET group works under the umbrella of the Plan Committee and is very active in the social science component of the Plan
- There has extensive collaboration with Flyways and others to undertake the surveys and Rudy Schuster, David Fulton and Howie Harshaw have been the Principle Investigators
- There is a lot than more to extract from the data than summarizing the survey results (see [www.nawmp.org](http://www.nawmp.org)) thus the PIs and the HD Working Group will be focusing their attention on this additional analysis in the coming months
- Nick Cole was hired to work under Rudy’s direction as a Post Doc. USGS is providing the first-year funding and Region 4 of USFWS will contribute additional funds for regional analyses. It’s possible that Region 3 may contribute, and the NFC agreed to release the surplus funds from the survey initiative to contribute to the Post Doc.
- Over the longer term the HDWG desires to put in place a permanent HD coordinator, and accordingly, they have developed a proposal
- Some publications already available from conference presentations and publish scientific papers, but Nick is developing timelines and a list of products that will be discussed at a meeting during the week of March 26<sup>th</sup> and PIs will outline what the analyses are:
- The Canadian North American Wetland Council has been developing national HD guidelines for to assist the JVs in Canada and to help inform HD activities in their future implementation plans. Additionally, proposals for new funding submitted to CWS include a small HD component; and the PHJV is adding a HD committee and HD expertise to its Management Board.

### **NAWMP/NAWCA Communications—*Dean Smith, AFWA***

- The new Communications Committee has representation from state, federal, and NGO organizations and will focus on planning the communications strategy for the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NAWCA and for NAWMP, in general. The purpose of the committee is to:
  - o Develop and guide a broad NAWMP Communications Strategy
  - o Build support for waterfowl and wetland conservation
  - o Create a NAWMP Communications Network
  - o Develop a NAWCA 30th Anniversary Communications Strategy

### **Legislative / Budget Priorities—*Jen Mock Schaefer, AFWA / Gildo Tori, DU Inc.***

- 2018 Farm Bill was a huge success thanks to all those involved in moving it forward and the bill signed by President was better than either the House or Senate versions
- RAWA, if approved, will redirect \$1.3B to state agencies to implement their State Wildlife Action Plans, and includes a 75:25 split, thus states will need a huge effort to get match in place. Currently, the team is working on red-line version of the text with Debbie Dingle's office as some issues/concerns have been raised with her office.
- For example, they don't want to affect authorities of the ESA and looking at a Tribal Title that would give similar structure and function to manage their responsibilities for fish, wildlife and flora on reserves – will make it clear that states would have the option to work together with Tribes, but also have a separate component for tribal funds
- The Hyde-Smith bill on setting season dates and providing veterans and youth with special hunting opportunities was ultimately passed and sent to the White House for signing. Veterans' hunt can be 2 weeks prior, during, or 2 weeks after the regular season, and includes active military, veterans, and national guard. The bill may create some pressure on states from veterans' groups or others once the bill is signed
- NAWCA – 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary has provided \$1.6B NAWCA matched by over \$4B. I would be great to have the act reauthorized on 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and there are currently two bills introduced - one in house and senate, which set the authorization at \$60M; with no restrictive language
- NAWCA Appropriation for 2019 received a bump of \$2M to \$42M; and the 2020 authorization process has just started. There will be a call to action that looks for 200 signatures in House and 50 in the Senate
- The waterfowl community would like to see the USFWS Migratory Bird program budget enhanced in 2020, but still awaiting the Interior component of the President's budget, which should be released on March 18<sup>th</sup>

### **ACTION: The Waterfowl Working Group and Bird Conservation Committee to draft a Resolution regarding the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NAWCA**

- o Dean, Jeff, Jen, Gildo to develop draft text

### **Hunter, Birdwatcher, Public Survey—*Rudy Schuster, USGS***

#### **General Public Survey**

- A general overview of the survey results was presented, including the demographics of respondents, their participation in recreation and conservation, and likelihood of participation in the next 12 months.
- Participation in conservation activities is generally low, except it is higher for making their personal backyards more wildlife friendly

- Hunters and rural residents were most engaged in conservation; while wildlife viewers, people who do not participate in wildlife-related recreation, and urban residents were the least engaged
- There are negative attitudes toward hunting but not bird watching.
- Overall there is a high concern about the reduction or loss of wetlands/waterfowl benefits—except for hunting opportunities
- Most preferred channels of nature/conservation information were:
  - o personal experience,
  - o online content, and
  - o visual media;
- Three most trusted sources of information were
  - o scientific organizations,
  - o universities/educational organizations, and
  - o friends/family
- **Implications of Research Results:**
  - o Promoting wetlands-related activities which include non-motorized activities and general wildlife/habitat conservation projects may help to engage people
  - o Messages which focus on the broad environmental benefits of wetlands and on many different species, not just waterfowl, may resonate best with the general public
  - o Online visual media produced in conjunction with scientific organizations and universities may be the most effective in communicating with the public
  - o Many people have negative attitudes toward hunting and/or are not interested in participating—attempting to recruit them as hunters may not be effective
  - o Given how many people knew a hunter and the high levels of trust people had in their friends/family, hunters may be effective ambassadors for promoting waterfowl and wetlands conservation.

#### **Discrete Choice Experiments** - *David Fulton, USGS*

- Research helps address Goal #3 of NAWMP and identify stakeholder preferences
- PowerPoint covered significant detail about how the experiments were conducted and the elements of the choices that survey participants had to select from – it is impossible to summarize all the details in these notes. Readers can contact Dean Smith ([dsmith@fishwildlife.org](mailto:dsmith@fishwildlife.org)) for additional details.
- In general terms, Canadian hunters have a preference to harvest 3 or more birds, desire easy to moderate access to hunting sites, want to travel less than two hours to the sites (strongly prefer one hour), would like to see many birds while hunting and desire low competition with other hunters at the hunting location
- US hunters have almost identical preferences but are likely to tolerate a bit more competition with other hunters.
- In general terms, Canadian bird watchers desire to see 30 or more bird species on an outing and would like the opportunity to see a rare species. They also desire to see many hundreds or more birds and in natural habitat settings with moderately difficult access. They are willing to between 80 and 100 km (50-60 miles).

**MBTA (M-Decision & AFWA Actions—*Judith Scarl, AFWA / Lane Kisonak, AFWA***

- AFWA working group setup last year and undertook review of state statutes and found 17 states have some provisions for incidental take, but they are less extensive than MBTA provisions
- The working group began compiling BMPs in December 2018 and their survey had responses from 35 states and 2 provinces on “air space or collisions of birds with structures” plus other types of BMPs. It is almost complete, however, there are issue regarding the location of a repository being and future responsibilities to accurately maintain and update the BMP lists
- The working group is also working with Audubon to develop model language for state statutes; starting with California, with four possible options:
  - o Advisory clarification that state laws are “in place or mention of IT in its statutes”
  - o Administrative rule making
  - o Legislation affirming coverage and detaching from federal regulations
  - o Legislation affirming coverage by state laws
- The contacts for this component of the work are: Erik Schneider – [eschneider@audubon.org](mailto:eschneider@audubon.org) and Lane Kisonak, [lkisonak@fishwildlife.org](mailto:lkisonak@fishwildlife.org)
- There is a new legal case from Colorado which has some language related to the MBTA but case is on appeal. The basic situation was:
  - o Heavy rainfall and runoff from feedlot killed approximately 14,000 fish,
  - o Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) pursued compensation,
  - o Trial court found in favor of CPW, and said that the “general take law” can be applied
  - o Appeal will be informative but initial decision is favorable for States
- Judith requested feedback from WWG on the following questions:
  - o Are we presenting the right menu of options for the model statutes?
  - o What states already have effective incidental take legislation that could be used as a model?
  - o What would you like to see improved about existing BMPs for the 5 most common threats?
  - o How effective are the BMPS your state/province uses for specific threats?
  - o How does your state/province evaluate the effectiveness of its BMPs?

**NAWMP Priority Landscapes Tool—Anastasia Krainyk, USGS**

- PowerPoint is posted in two parts on the Waterfowl Working Group website
- The initial presentation on this work was made at the Future of Waterfowl II workshop at NCTC, and there were some concerns expressed about the consistency of how priority areas were identified. Additionally, the new version presented at this meeting incorporated social objectives which hadn’t been in earlier maps
- Priority Landscapes Committee (PLC) was established in 2015 with specific criteria for its work, to develop a new framework for identifying geographies of continental importance for waterfowl and people:
  - o Should be science-based (on empirical data), transparent, repeatable, and scalable; and
  - o Should include breeding and non-breeding waterfowl objectives and social objectives

- Used a structured decision-making approach to develop a 'spatial value model' where the objectives were to have performance measures, utility functions, weights (subjective), spatial value models; and once these have been identified, use a multi-attribute approach at pixel scale
- Biological objective level:
  - Ducks grouped by life history strategies, with geese considered separately,
- Social Objectives
  - Considered hunter conservationist, other conservationist; birders and other public supporters
- Maps were stacked to provide a thunderstorm type of map
  - Five relevant maps
    - Breeding Waterfowl – couldn't determine regional priorities without extensive consultation so used equal weighting
    - Non-breeding Waterfowl – applied equal weighting
    - Social objectives (5 objectives considered, but 3 have multiple elements) – weights equally distributed
    - Mixed model of all the objectives – biological and social components were equally weighted
- Implications / Use / Limitations
  - PLC believes it achieved project objectives
  - Expect output in USGS publication in April
  - Process is repeatable and documentation will be available through USGS
  - The approach is also scalable and flexible
  - Thunderstorm map can be produced such that if you set priority thresholds, then can produce something similar to the previous polygon maps
  - There are data limitations and some geographies are critical for only a limited number of species thus maps very different than previous maps
    - Need to understand data deficiencies
    - Weighting has a big impact, if regional input included
- Future
  - Implication is that GIS experts required if the waterfowl community wants something other than the five map products produced
  - The PLC's work does provide a decision-support tool that users could apply, but the current product should still be considered to be in a testing phase
  - There is work being done on a side project in Upper MS Great Lakes JV where:
    - Scaling is at a regional level for preferences, such as regionally important species and social issues – so this kind of product can help visualize the differences between alternative scenarios or different weighting of "issues"
    - It should be noted that social objectives increased higher priority areas
    - Could add other objectives in a regional scale – like groundwater recharge; or sea-level rise
- Conclusions:
  - Results could be used to develop the next iteration of the NAWMP map of geographies of greatest significance to waterfowl and people
  - Spatial products could be used to aid resource allocation decisions
  - Spatial products could be used to highlight data gaps

- Spatial products could be used to develop regional (small scale) prioritization maps
- Process is transparent, consistent, repeatable, flexible, and scalable

**Canadian Wetlands Roundtable Update—Pat Kehoe, DUC**

- In the early days of NAWCC (Canada) there was a Wetland Secretariat lead by Ken Cox, that was arms-length to government, and this group was able to input into policy and other initiatives
- In 2014, the Canadian waterfowl and wetlands conservation community began setting up new structure that included industry, as they use and impact wetlands
- Priorities:
  - Engage new members
  - Develop core capacity
  - Program delivery
- Science Program – wetland inventory and letter written to ministers; there is a value proposition
- Management Program – national wetland conservation framework – offset policies – BMPs
- Stewardship Programs – partner on new resources
- Information Program – website [www.wetlandroundtable.ca](http://www.wetlandroundtable.ca)

**State Contributions to Canada—Dave Kustersky, DUC**

- As reported last September, forty-one states contributed a total of \$3,480,793 (US) dollars to Canadian waterfowl habitat projects during 2017-18. This is an increase to a record number of states and the second highest annual total investment by states.
- There is an on-going effort to develop a new name and brand for the program, however, we are still awaiting a decision from BassPro shops on the use of a name that they use for a specific product line.

**Action Items Review—Craig LeSchack, DU Inc.**

1. Draft resolution in support of NAWCA's 30th Anniversary and collaborate with the appropriate AWFA committees/working groups and stakeholders/partners over the summer in an attempt to reach agreement on a resolution for consideration at the AFWA Business Meeting in September.
2. Develop the 2019-20 annual Work Plan.
3. Share the NAWMP Priority Landscapes presentation on the Waterfowl Working Group's webpage on the AFWA website.
4. Engage with the NAMWP/NAWCC communication efforts, especially around NAWCA 30th anniversary.