

The All-Bird Bulletin

Bird Conservation News and Information



February 2005

From the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI)



NABCI is dedicated to promoting and advancing integrated bird conservation in North America.

NABCI's goal is to deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships.

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The All-Bird Bulletin is a bi-monthly news and information-sharing publication for participants of NABCI. To receive this publication, contact the editor, Roxanne Bogart, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 802-872-0629 ext. 25 Roxanne_Bogart@fws.gov

A Bird's Eye View from the Editor

Bird Conservation Regions: More Than Just Lines On A Map

BCRs and the Beginning of NABCI

In November 1998, 125 scientists, policymakers, and conservationists from across the continent gathered in the Mexican city of Puebla to attend the first international workshop of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). Up until this time, NABCI was nothing more than a group of nine people from Mexico, the United States, and Canada discussing and documenting a widely shared vision of a more comprehensive and concerted bird conservation effort in North America. At the Puebla workshop, however, that began to change.

People came to Puebla with a mission to improve coordination among the existing initiatives for waterfowl, landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds and develop an integrated approach to North American bird conservation. At the time, however, no common set of geospatial units existed for this integration. So, under the banner of NABCI, conservationists agreed to produce one of the initiative's first tangible products: a coherent biogeographic framework to organize bird conservation on the ground. In other words, a map.

Over the next several months, three teams of scientists from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico divided up their respective countries into a total of 67 ecological units based on a spatial framework developed by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and agreed upon in Puebla. They named these units Bird Conservation Regions or 'BCRs' and recognized them as landscapes with distinct bird communities, habitats, and resource management issues. Examples include Boreal Softwood Shield (BCR 8), Northern Rockies (BCR 10), Prairie Potholes (BCR 11), Atlantic Northern Forest (BCR 14), Edwards Plateau (BCR 20), Central Hardwoods (BCR 24), and Tamaulipan Brushlands (BCR 36).

At its inaugural meeting in October 1999, the U.S. NABCI Committee endorsed the U.S. BCR map, acknowledging it as a dynamic tool for bird conservation planning. The endorsement was one of the most important steps ever taken by this Committee, a coalition of federal, state, and private wildlife conservation organizations and representatives from the bird initiatives Partners In Flight, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, Waterbird Conservation for the Americas, North American Waterfowl Management Plan, and working groups for resident game birds. This high-level backing of BCRs conveyed the importance of viewing the earth's lands and waters from avian, rather than human, perspectives—of the need to design sustainable landscapes for birds without stopping at political or administrative borders.

Some people thought, "Not another ecological classification system!" But for others, with an interest in harmonizing their bird conservation work across taxonomic, geopolitical, and

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Waterbird Council Holds Annual Meeting

The Waterbird Conservation Council, the guiding body for the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas initiative, held its third annual meeting in January 2005, in Nassau, Bahamas. The Council is responsible for facilitating the implementation of the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan and other regional waterbird plans. The geographic extent of the initiative includes North America, Central America, the islands and waters of the Caribbean, the Pacific Ocean including the U.S.-associated Pacific Islands, and the western Atlantic Ocean including Bermuda.

Council Committees reported on 2004 actions, discussed major issues and challenges for the initiative, and determined its workplan for 2005. Notable were resolutions to seek partners in South America, work more closely with other bird initiatives, particularly those outside North America, and more directly engage regional working groups in Council activities. The Council agreed to produce a communications piece by mid-2005 that details initiative progress towards a second version of the continental-scale plan, which will include more guidance on the conservation of non-colonial waterbirds and more details on the needs and priorities of various regions, especially the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America.

The Bahamas National Trust, a local partner, hosted the Council meetings, which helped strengthen relationships among Council members, allowed for participation by a Cuban Council member, and lent credibility and visibility to the hosting organization. Proceedings will be posted to <http://www.waterbirdconservation.org>.



North America's only native stork, the Wood Stork is a colonial waterbird species of high concern that forages in fresh water and nests in tall stands of cypress, mangroves, and dead trees of flooded impoundments. /Photo by George Gentry.

Biodiversity Center Releases Remote Sensing Web Site

The American Museum of Natural History's Center for Biodiversity and Conservation (CBC) announces the public release of a website to promote the use of remotely sensed imagery, such as satellite imagery and aerial photography.

Did you know that it is currently possible to freely download and view satellite images for almost any location on the planet? Developments in satellite image archives and viewers have made it easier than ever to access and utilize this wealth of data. The CBC's Remote Sensing Resources Web site focuses on the practical aspects of accessing, visualizing, and processing satellite imagery. The site is designed with beginners in mind, but also has many features that are of interest to more experienced users. It is a work in progress that is being designed to meet the needs of a broad community interested in using satellite imagery. Feedback about existing content and suggestions for future content would be appreciated. Over time the site will grow with new sections on species distribution modeling, geographic information systems, conservation-focused software tools, and others.

The site is divided into four main sections: (1) Remote sensing guides - CBC designed guides to locate, download, and view satellite imagery; (2) Training resources - material and information for remote sensing training courses and workshops offered by the CBC and other organizations; (3) Interactive tools - tools to illustrate fundamental remote sensing concepts; and (4) Net resources - links to an array of remote sensing information available on the Internet.

Visit the site at <http://cbc.rs-gis.amnh.org/>. For more information or to comment on the site, contact Ned Horning horning@amnh.org.

Scientists Collaborating to Determine Status of Prairie Wetlands

The wetlands of the prairie region of North America have long been recognized for their ecological significance to a variety of birds, such as breeding and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, and grassland birds, as well as for other important wildlife, environmental, and social values. During the past century, however, humans have drained expansive areas of prairie wetlands, with loss in some portions of the U.S. so extensive that only isolated tracts of habitat remain. Despite their importance, no comprehensive, scientifically sound data are available on the continental status of these remaining prairie wetlands. To fill this need, scientists from the U.S. and Canada have initiated a cross-border project to track wetland changes throughout the prairie region.

The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) currently monitors and reports trend data for wetlands in the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (PHJV) area to support this partnership's efforts to manage and conserve wetland habitats for birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), under the Wetlands Status and Trends program, continues to provide the country's relevant wetland data, a valuable tool for bird habitat conservation in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV). Through a combination of these two programs, the CWS and the Service are working toward an ecosystem-wide report on the status and trends of prairie wetlands.



The glaciated prairie region is an area of about 777,000 square kilometers (300,000 square miles) located in central North America. In the U.S., the Prairie Region extends from central Iowa north to the Canadian border and includes portions of Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana. In Canada, this region is even more extensive and includes parts of three provinces; Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The movement towards all-bird conservation emphasizes the need for greater cooperation among the nations of the continent, as evidenced in the structure of the Bird Conservation Regions (BCR), which are ecoregion-based and trans-border by design. The focus of this federal partnership effort is on a large portion of BCR 11 or the Prairie Potholes which includes both the PHJV and the PPJV areas.

The collaborative report will provide contemporary and vital habitat resource information to serve continental migratory bird management and wildlife and wetland conservation. It will be the first of its kind to address ecosystem-wide components independent of national boundaries, establishing a benchmark for other collaborative efforts. Recently, staff specialists from CWS and the Service have participated in technical exchanges, evaluating and comparing issues such as wetland classification cross-walks, study area delineation, methods coordination, collaborative field work, agreement on terminology, and joint reporting.

For more information, contact Michael D. Watmough, Canadian Wildlife Service, (780) 951-8638, michael.watmough@ec.gc.ca or Thomas E. Dahl, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (608) 783-8425, tom_dahl@fws.gov

California Holds All-Bird Conservation Workshop

In November 2004, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and PRBO Conservation Science co-sponsored California's first all-bird conservation workshop in Sacramento, bringing together 147 representatives from 44 different organizations. The purpose of the workshop was to improve coordination among joint venture, bird initiative, and state conservation efforts, such as the State Wildlife Diversity Project, and other programs. About half of the participants were state employees with the other half a mix of representatives from joint ventures, federal agencies, non-profits, universities, and private consulting firms. The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, CDFG, Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, DMARLOU Foundation, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation all provided financial support.

During habitat breakout sessions, participants discussed existing habitat plans and ways to integrate all-bird conservation within the following habitat types: riparian/wetland/marine, coniferous forest/oak woodland, agricultural lands/grasslands, and shrubsteppe/desert/coastal sage scrub. People discussed the California Partners in Flight habitat-based bird conservation plans which, most agreed, are used by organizations in a variety of ways, such as to prioritize conservation areas, set project goals, evaluate proposals for funding, develop research designs, and inform decision-making processes.



The range of the Black Oystercatcher stretches from Alaska to Baja California. A shorebird species of high concern, it is vulnerable to disturbance of nest sites and to effects of oil spills and other pollution in the intertidal zone. /Photo by Barry Reswig.

The groups discussed ways to better disseminate plan information, including incorporating plan components into Natural Resource Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guides and creating regional, synthesized versions of the plans for county planners, private landholders, and others. Other existing plans include a marine bird plan for the entire California Current and shorebird conservation plans for the Southern Pacific and Intermountain West planning regions.

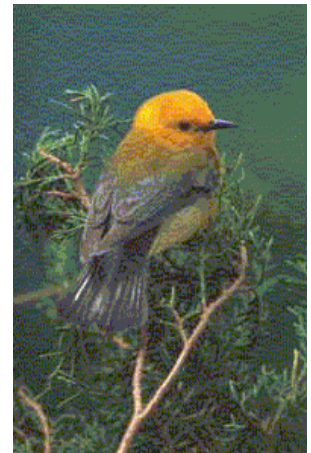
The workshop's second day focused on resources available to wildlife biologists and managers, such as monitoring and evaluation tools, archiving and analysis of data, and project funding. Joint venture coordinators provided an overview of their new all-bird strategies and lead discussion among participants on focal areas and priority species within joint venture boundaries and how partners could identify common objectives. For more information, contact Kim Kreitinger, PRBO Conservation Science kkreitinger@prbo.org or Sam Blankenship, California Department of Fish and Game, sblanken@dfg.ca.gov.

Wetland Habitat Fund Helps Warblers

The Prothonotary Warbler is endangered in Canada, where a handful of scattered pairs and lone singing males attempt to breed in remnant southern Ontario swamp forests. Landowners involved in the Ontario Wetland Habitat Fund (OWHF) could be allies of these rare and beautiful birds, and program staff and partners are exploring ways to make this happen.

The OWHF is a wetland stewardship program of Wildlife Habitat Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other partners in the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture. Staff of the OWHF collaborates with landowners to secure and enhance waterfowl habitat on private lands. Bird Studies Canada and the Prothonotary Warbler Recovery Team, with support from Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, are teaming up with OWHF field staff to assess how well OWHF-restored wetlands meet the warbler's habitat requirements.

"The Wetland Habitat Fund has helped create or restore many wetlands within Prothonotary Warbler range in southwestern Ontario," says Canadian Wildlife Service biologist and Recovery Team co-chair Jeff Robinson. "We are assessing how well these waterfowl projects contribute the warbler's recovery."



A Partners In Flight Watchlist species, the Prothonotary Warbler breeds in flooded riverbottom hardwoods and near the borders of lakes, rivers, and ponds. /Photo by Simpson.

“Several projects near occupied Prothonotary territories have good potential to become suitable habitat — in some cases in the near future,” says Robinson. “These are larger and deeper, open wetlands next to mature flooded swamps and floodplains that are ringed by woodland with suitable nest cavities.” Willing landowners with Habitat Fund conservation agreements are now being approached to consider phase two: expanding their wetlands to benefit both waterfowl and Prothonotary Warbler habitat.

For more information, contact Mark Stabb at mstabb@wetlandfund.com or (613) 722-2090 or visit the Wetland Habitat Fund web site <http://www.wetlandfund.com>.

North American Grouse Management Plan Prospectus Available



The largest grouse in North America, the Greater Sage-Grouse depends on relatively large expanses of sagebrush-dominated shrub-steppe, which is being lost and fragmented by clearing for farmland and overgrazing. /Photo by Gary Kramer.

The North American Grouse Partnership (Partnership) was founded in 1999 by professional biologists, wildlife managers, and conservationists in response to both chronic and impending threats to grouse, most notably those species that depend on grassland and sagebrush communities. Without exception, habitats of North American grouse have declined in extent and quality from historic levels. An assortment of land uses have contributed to these losses, including some livestock grazing practices, invasion by non-native plants, growth of energy development, increased motorized recreational use on public lands, and expanding rural residential development. The Partnership was formed to coordinate a constituency of stakeholders to help raise the profile of the landscape-level challenges to these species and to advocate for their conservation.

The Partnership’s mission is to promote the conservation of grouse and the habitats necessary for their survival and reproduction. To help achieve its mission, the Partnership is developing the North American Grouse Management Plan. Since many jurisdictions and land uses affect grouse populations, conservation efforts must be coordinated at a landscape scale. Grants from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and funding from state agencies and others are supporting development

of range-wide plans for all North American grouse species. The prospectus for the Plan can be accessed at <http://www.grousepartners.org/pdfs/Plandraft.pdf>.

Eleven species of grouse occur in North American prairies, shrublands, forests, and tundras. Because grouse are charismatic, prized for harvest, and occupy a majority of the terrestrial ecosystems in North America, they are ideal flagship species for ecosystem management. Further, the habitat scale and diversity

required for grouse conservation exceeds that of most other birds, and rivals that of large carnivores such as bears, wolves, and mountain lion. Therefore, managing for grouse will result in significant benefits not only to other wildlife and plant species, but also to the ecosystems upon which they and humans depend. Grouse now occur within 30 of the 37 BCRs in the United States and Canada.

More information can be found at the Partnership’s web site <http://www.grousepartners.org/> or by contacting the national office at nagp@grousepartners.org or (301) 223-1533.

IUCN Urges Protection of North America's Boreal Forest

In November 2004, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), one of the world's most important conservation bodies, passed a recommendation calling for conservation of the boreal forest in Canada and Russia. Canada's boreal forest is one of the largest intact forests on the planet and provides nesting grounds for as many as one-third (an estimated three billion) of North America's landbirds and almost half of the continent's waterfowl.

In Canada's boreal region, unlike in so many other once great forests and wetlands, a tremendous opportunity exists for conservation planning in advance of any future development. However, the boreal region is under increasing development pressure, as commercial interest in industrial logging, hydropower, mining, and oil and gas development continues to grow.

The IUCN, commonly called the World Conservation Congress, helps set the global environmental agenda. It officially recognized several vital aspects of the boreal forest, including its storage of more freshwater and carbon than any other terrestrial ecosystem, its role as a cultural landscape for thousands of indigenous people, and its multitude of wildlife.

With members representing environmental organizations and government agencies from 140 countries, the IUCN convenes every four years to discuss and find solutions to the world's most pressing conservation issues. More than 10,000 scientists participate in the IUCN. For complete text of the recommendation (R021) and more information on efforts to protect the boreal forest, please visit the Boreal Songbird Initiative website at <http://www.borealbirds.org> or visit the IUCN site at <http://www.iucn.org/congress/index.cfm>.



The Common Loon nests near water on islands or shores of lakes in the coniferous forest zone. Human disturbance is responsible for its disappearance from former breeding areas, and acid rain may reduce food supplies. /Photo by Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) *(from page 1)*

cultural boundaries, BCRs represented much more than just lines on a map. They represented an important step to improve communication among the bird initiatives, each of which was independently producing regional, national, and international conservation plans with its own species priorities and goals. BCRs provided clearly defined bioregions within which conservationists could collaborate to identify priority species and their biological needs and design sustainable landscapes to guide the development of projects to achieve all of the initiatives' goals and objectives.

BCRs and Joint Ventures

The idea of regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships for conservation was certainly not novel. Since the late 1980's, waterfowl conservationists had been working within U.S and Canadian joint ventures—regions delineated partly based on waterfowl habitat areas of importance and partly on convenient political and administrative boundaries. They include Atlantic Coast, Intermountain West, Gulf Coast, and Playa Lakes, to name a few. Public-private joint venture management boards and their coordinators developed and carried out habitat conservation projects for wetlands and associated habitats, such as grasslands, leveraging funds through a variety of partnerships that reflected the ecological, cultural, and political character of the region.

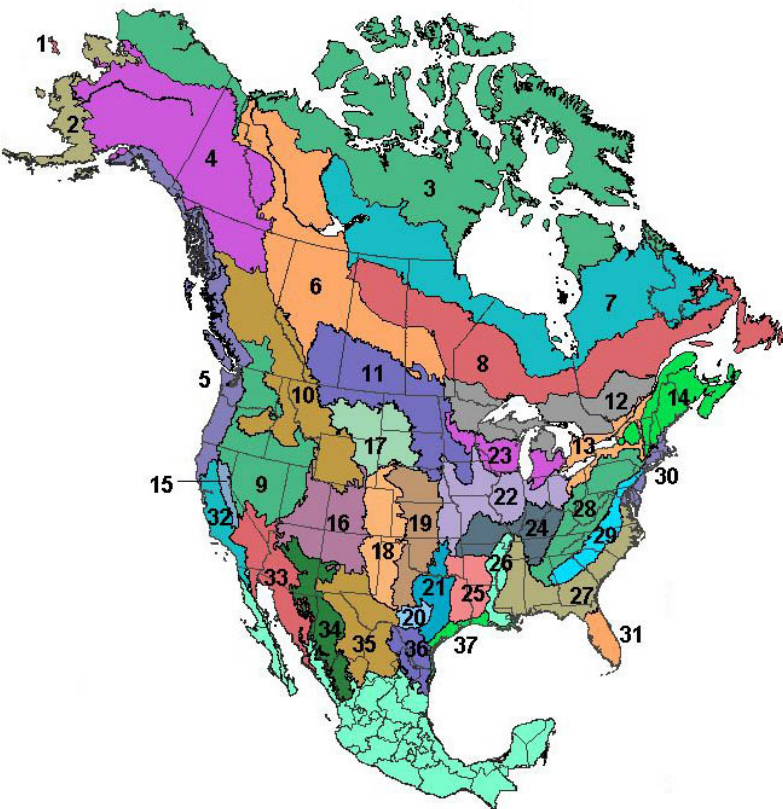
Up until several years ago, however, most joint ventures focused solely on waterfowl conservation and thus were absent from regions less important to this species group, such as the desert southwest, Appalachian Mountains, and parts of the midwest. But with the emergence of NABCI and the maturation of the other bird conservation initiatives and plans, the idea of somehow merging the BCR concept and active joint venture partnerships slowly crystallized. BCRs provide the primary units for biological planning and conservation design. Joint ventures provide the administrative structures and partnership networks to develop and carry out projects on the ground, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now responsible for approving joint venture implementation plans. It seemed plausible that joint ventures, if broadened in mission and amplified in geographic extent, could become the implementation arm for integrated bird conservation.

Besides, during the 1990's several joint ventures were already starting to diversify: Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture was setting objectives for Swallow-tailed Kites and Cerulean Warblers. Prairie Pothole Joint Venture was investigating the management needs of migrating and breeding shorebirds such as White-rumped Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, and Mountain Plover. Pacific Coast Joint Venture was restoring coastal wetlands habitat for shorebirds and Pacific salmon. More recently new 'all-bird' joint ventures have formed, such as Sonoran and Central Hardwoods Joint Ventures, fully embracing from square one the broader bird perspective.

As the waterfowl joint ventures one-by-one accepted responsibility for guiding and delivering habitat conservation for all priority birds in their region, BCR-based planning was taking shape. The shorebird and waterbird coalitions established regional planning units based on BCRs or composites of BCRs, and the latter expanded on the theme by developing the new Pelagic Bird Conservation Regions (PBCRs) for seabirds. The geographical building blocks for the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative's regional plan are none other than—BCRs. The plan consists of separate chapters with population and habitat objectives for each of 15 BCRs. And the recently produced PIF Continental Landbird Conservation Plan identifies stewardship species in seven Avifaunal Biomes, groups of BCRs with shared avifauna determined by cluster analysis.

To facilitate BCR-based planning, scientists with the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center estimated regional population change and annual indices by BCR using Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data from 1966 to 2002 (visit <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/bbsbcr2002.html>). They determined that BCRs appear to provide reasonable strata for the summary of BBS data. Around the same time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified nongame birds of conservation concern by BCR (see Birds of Conservation Concern 2002 at <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/reports/BCC2002.pdf>). As BCR-based planning continued and the scope of joint ventures widened, the vision of how to deliver all-bird conservation in the U.S. and Canada soon came into focus.

Bird Conservation Regions

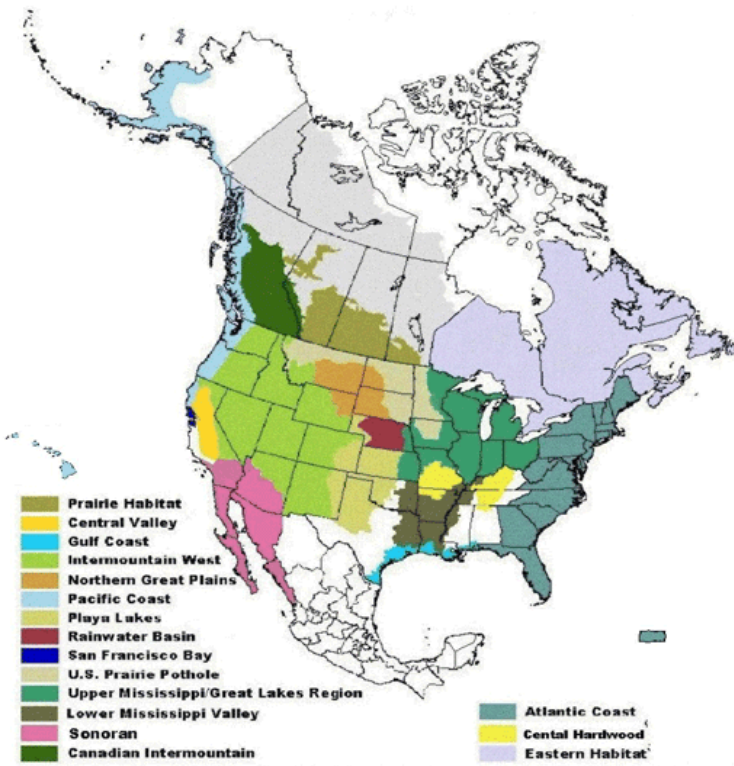


1. Aleutian/Bering Sea Islands
2. Western Alaska
3. Arctic Plains and Mountains
4. Northwestern Interior Forest
5. Northern Pacific Rainforest
6. Boreal Taiga Plains
7. Taiga Shield and Hudson Plains
8. Boreal Softwood Shield
9. Great Basin
10. Northern Rockies
11. Prairie Potholes
12. Boreal Hardwood Transition
13. Lower Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Plain
14. Atlantic Northern Forest
15. Sierra Nevada
16. Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau
17. Badlands and Prairies
18. Shortgrass Prairie
19. Central Mixed-grass Prairie
20. Edwards Plateau
21. Oaks and Prairies
22. Eastern Tallgrass Prairie
23. Prairie Hardwood Transition
24. Central Hardwoods
25. West Gulf Coastal Plain/Ouachitas
26. Mississippi Alluvial Valley
27. Southeastern Coastal Plain
28. Appalachian Mountains
29. Piedmont
30. New England/Mid-Atlantic Coast
31. Peninsular Florida
32. Coastal California
33. Sonoran and Mohave Deserts
34. Sierra Madre Occidental
35. Chihuahuan Desert
36. Tamaulipan Brushlands
37. Gulf Coastal Prairie

BCR Coordinators and Joint Venture Coordinators: Working Together

There is no template or standard operating procedures for the ongoing synchronization of BCRs and joint ventures. Any description is a mere snapshot of an evolving process that varies from place to place, dictated by funding, opportunity, and human dynamics and motivation.

North American Joint Ventures



Currently, seventeen discrete joint ventures spread across most of the U.S. and Canadian landscape. Eight dedicated BCR Coordinators work with joint ventures, states, and other partners in their regions on biological planning for all-bird conservation, including activities such as identifying priority species and habitats and assessing threats, limiting factors, and habitat capacity. In joint ventures such as Pacific Coast, Northern Great Plains, and Central Hardwoods, the joint venture and BCR boundaries (BCR 5, 17, and 24 respectively) are nearly one and the same and the equation is simple. Playa Lakes Joint Venture expanded its boundaries to encompass both Shortgrass Prairie (BCR 18) and most of Central Mixed-grass Prairie (BCR 19). Coordinators work in BCR 5 and BCR 18. In other regions the geography for coordination is more challenging. For example, BCR Coordinators for the Atlantic Northern Forest (BCR 14) and Northern Rockies (BCR 10) must coordinate across regions that extend into Canada and overlap with more than one joint venture.

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, which spans 17 states and Puerto Rico, employs assistant joint venture coordinators who serve the Joint Venture's northern, middle, and southern reaches. Within these still expansive subregions, BCR-based coordinators work in the Atlantic

Northern Forest (BCR 14), Appalachian Mountains (BCR 28), and Piedmont (BCR 29). Intermountain West, a vast area covering 11 states or portions of states, has taken on a similar approach with BCR coordinators working with the Joint Venture in Great Basin (BCR 9), Northern Rockies (BCR 10), and Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau (BCR 16).

Coordinators across the country are working with partners to produce all-bird conservation plans, with many now in draft form. The final draft of the Central Hardwoods BCR Plan is available at <http://www.nabci-us.org/bcr24.html> or www.abcbirds.org/nabci/chjv_plan.htm. A draft plan for Atlantic Northern Forest is available at <http://www.acjv.org/publication.htm>. Visit the U.S. NABCI Web site's interactive map of BCR and joint venture contacts for both the U.S. and Canada <http://nabci-us.org/map.html>. *Note: Mexican BCRs and regional partnership activities will be presented in a future issue of The All-Bird Bulletin.*

Western U.S. Joint Ventures Hold Science Seminar

Members of four joint ventures representing 17 western states from California to the Dakotas met at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Region 6 office in Denver, Colorado in January 2005, to present bird planning strategies and discuss common science issues. The seminar was attended by the Intermountain West, Playa Lakes, Prairie Pothole, and Rainwater Basin Joint Venture staffs, including several BCR Coordinators, Regional Service personnel, and representatives from the U.S. Geological Survey, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society and Ducks Unlimited. The seminar marked the first regional gathering of joint ventures and highlighted the critical need to continue to share approaches and expand partnerships to capitalize on the best science resources available. Contact Carol Lively (Carol_Lively@fws.gov) for more details about the meeting. Visit <http://www.nabci-us.org/jvmap.html> for information on the specific joint ventures.