

**Minutes from the fifth meeting of the
US NABCI Committee - 30 January 2001
Arlington, Virginia**

Committee Members present: Marshall Jones and Bob McDowell (co-chairs), Stephen Brown (for Steve Miller), George Fenwick, Jim Kushlan, Val Mezainis, Gary Myers, Rollie Sparrowe, Alan Wentz, Scott Yaich

Members absent: George Vandel

Staff present: David Pashley (Coordinator), Paul Schmidt, Bob Ford, Len Ugarenko

Others in attendance: Jon Andrew, Ellie Brown, Dee Butler, Jack Capp, Dave Davis, Naomi Edelson, Steve Funderburk, Elizabeth Martin, Kim McClurg, Tom Melius, Andrew Milliken, Seth Mott, Mila Plavsic, Debbie Pressman, Herb Raffaele, Terry Rich, David Smith, Melanie Steinkamp, Scott Sutherland, Chris Tollefson, Ken Williams, Jim Woehr

Ground rules

Bob McDowell - Because of uncertainties as to protocol during past meetings, the following ground rules for running this and subsequent meetings are suggested:
During discussions, all Committee members are free to speak when called upon by the chair; Committee staff should communicate through their Committee member. After discussion by Committee members, others in attendance may be called upon for comment. Committee decisions should be by consensus; Parliamentary procedure will not be necessary.

Role of the US NABCI Committee

D. Pashley reviewed past meeting minutes as they are relevant to this topic.

B. McDowell noted that there are concerns regarding the role of state agencies in NABCI. In particular, wildlife diversity staff are asking how NABCI fits with their activities. NABCI should be additive, and clearly perceived as such. Better communications may be at the core of solving this confusion. R.Sparrowe recalled that the North American Waterfowl Plan went through the same process of concern from state agencies, and that, as then, communication is an important challenge. J.Kushlan pointed out that BCRs are fundamental to NABCI, but that NABCI must explicitly recognize other implementation levels and scales, including states. The hiring of BCR Coordinators got the attention of wildlife diversity coordinators. N.Edelson noted that one problem is that nongame staff are overwhelmed by responsibilities, and their view is that NABCI is moving ahead without state nongame people. G.Myers said that in Tennessee, BCR Coordinators are perceived as existing to facilitate partner activities - they do not direct but rather assist partners, including state agencies, be more effective at bird conservation. States must be assisted in understanding their role within an ecoregional context. Furthermore, diversity coordinators are rarely in the chain of command leading to on-the-ground conservation

work; plugging these people into appropriate roles to reduce problems is a state issue. B.McDowell agreed, but said that issues of overlap just need to be resolved. Would a Subcommittee of Wildlife Diversity Coordinator help in this regard? T.Melius responded that addressing this problem through a Communications Strategy might, for now, be better than increasing NABCI bureaucracy.

S.Brown referred to increasing tension between being proactive and respecting the autonomy of partners - we need to agree on a model and then communicate that model to initiatives and other partners. B.McDowell commented that hiring BCR Coordinators was a threshold that, once passed over, stimulated confusion. S.Yaich responded that Coordinators have been hired on the basis of local decisions by local partners, not by the US NABCI Committee, and that this is an important distinction rarely noted in discussions of confusion over roles.

V.Mezaonis noted that a communications strategy should be a two way street in which we both inform and seek input. J.Kushlan added that such a strategy should stimulate greater involvement by groups such as those focused on upland game birds. G.Fenwick pointed out that major NGOs are perhaps even less plugged in to NABCI than are state agencies. H.Raffaele added that focus of the four major initiatives leaves out many forces involved in bird conservation - development of a consistent message and then efforts to pull these entities into the NABCI camp are important.

G.Fenwick said that we have been developing NABCI messages, but that events are outpacing these messages - as long as we progress, we are destined to always be just out of date. This imperfection reflects the onrush of conservation action. New committees and new messages may be fine, but the limiting factor is the time that Committee members and staff have to transmit those messages. Creating time is more of an issue than creating new messages.

S.Yaich pointed out that Committee roles are laid out in the Charter, but how we function as a Committee is less clear. Of late, the Committee has been less proactive and more reactive, without aggressively pushing a NABCI agenda. Do we need a subcommittee of members to work more closely with staff to change this situation? D. Pashley agreed, noting that almost all of the action items requested by the committee have either been accomplished or are well underway, but NABCI staff could use more guidance on issues of substantive progress.

Various suggestions regarding use of existing Subcommittees or establishment of new Subcommittees followed, but there was no clear resolution of direction. **Concluding remarks included a statement of need for a Strategic Implementation Committee in which a few Committee members could assume leadership roles and work with D.Pashley and other staff on a day-to-day basis. Development of a Work Plan with more formal guidance and accountability for staff was also mentioned, perhaps as an alternative to additional Committee structure.**

J.Kushlan - Requests that D.Pashley (along with other NABCI staff, BCR staff, committee chairs, etc.) put forth in one document an annual goals Work Plan that sets out agenda for

staff and committee to evaluate progress, perhaps by March 2001? T.Melius favors the idea, but would like to see some delay as new co-chairs get up to speed.

Communications strategy

Ken Williams reported on work completed and actions proposed in response to a resolution passed by the US NABCI Committee in Indianapolis to develop a conservation strategy. A draft of a proposal to develop this strategy was approved by both the NGO and Federal Agency Subcommittees. The proposed actions are as follows:

- 1) Formation of a small working group of federal, state, and NGO representatives to replace the existing drafting group with the task of articulating and communicating to the US NABCI Committee a communications strategy.
- 2) This group will contract with a professional expert in communications for development and implementation of this strategy.
- 3) Each member of the NABCI Committee should identify principle communications contacts within their organization. This will not be a short term effort and must involve both inreach and outreach.
- 4) Resources and staff time must be committed to this effort. Contract funding required is estimated to be \$45K, \$15K of which has been dedicated by the NGO Subcommittee (with money initially contributed to the effort by the CEC) and the remaining \$30K committed by members of the Federal Agency Subcommittee (WMI has volunteered to serve as banker for this project).

Discussion:

The first target audience identified consists of federal and state agency staff - should not NGOs be included in this first wave, as they could be reached through only a slightly broader treatment? Whatever the initial target, this has to be seen as part of a broader strategy ultimately designed to reach multiple audiences. It was cautioned, however, that too broad of a target, even in the long run, must be avoided.

Although the target of mid-level staff is good, S.Yaich noted that communication to state agency directors continues to be a key need. B.McDowell agreed, but emphasized that mid-level decision-makers in agencies are the ones who put conservation on the ground, and must be our primary target.

K.Williams indicated that the timing for beginning this process is immediate, in part because there are time constraints on spending some of the dedicated funds. A.Wentz suggested that finding someone internally within a partner agency to work on this on detail for three months could avoid the time lag of an outside consultant or contractor getting up to speed. What we may need is a Coordinator who knows the business more than a contractor specialized in communications who we would have to instruct regarding NABCI. A lot of the work that is needed is tactical rather than conceptual, and a 6-month or year long Coordinator could be the

quickest and most effective way to beneficially utilize available funds. P.Schmidt noted, however, that there have been positive experiences in utilizing outside contractors to accomplish tasks such as the one outlined.

M.Steinkamp suggested that one avenue may be the “workshops” recently approved for a federal aid grant. An organizer and messages for these workshops are lacking, but the money is there to bring attendees and instructors together . . . is there a possible connection to this NABCI communications strategy? B.McDowell suggested that these workshops be part of the strategy addressed by the working group and contractor.

G.Myers reminded the Committee that the objective is not so much to sell NABCI, but rather the concept of cooperative bird conservation and the existing initiatives. L.Niles commented that part of the lack of clarity revolves around confusion as to what is and what is not involved in NABCI. K.Williams added that there are many existing strands and opportunities to present this message, and an initial charge to the working group is to simply identify what is relevant. P.Schmidt reminded that there are lots of tools already in existence created explicitly as communications devices.

D.Pressman emphasized that we not only want to target an audience, but we also must determine just what it is that we want that audience to do. V.Mezaonis added that implementation of communication efforts should not be delayed until a full strategy is in place, because there is urgency in getting our message out now. B.McDowell summarized that the strategy should simply be a menu of opportunities with appropriate messages attached.

K.Williams recommended that the drafting committee recommend members in the working group to D.Pashley and thence to the Committee co-chairs in the very near future. Committee members with working group suggestions should get those quickly to D.Pashley. Whoever is contracted should work with working group and report to D.Pashley

The Committee accepted the proposals from the Communications drafting team and urges rapid action in response.

Joint Venture Management Board Report

P.Schmidt - Chairs of the US habitat Joint Venture Management Boards met recently for the first time, and among their issues of concern was their relationship with NABCI and specifically the US NABCI Committee. A letter to the NABCI Co-chairs makes two major requests, first specifically asking NABCI to join with JVs in approaching Congress with a unified, uniform message, starting during the week of Feb. 20, and second that, in general that NABCI and the Joint Ventures work together to deliver consistent messages.

After a brief discussion, the Committee agreed to this recommendation. However, there are

some logistical challenges involved in that there are multiple meetings. S.Sutherland pointed out that the key meeting is with Interior Appropriations staff in the House and Senate, and NABCI presence there would be valuable. Otherwise, having a consistent message is key, even if NABCI cannot be involved in every individual meeting. We need to speak with a common voice over broadening JVs, NAWCA, raising money, etc. A.Wentz stressed that NABCI does not lobby, but rather this can be done by member organizations. K.Williams noted that promotion of JVs should be linked to ongoing efforts by the Federal Agency Subcommittee to link budgets and create synergies. G.Myers suggested that JV budget requests be incorporated into IAFWA recommendations. In general, it was noted that we are dealing with both a new Administration and new Chairs of Appropriations Committees, and that we cannot assume that past communications have reached any of these new people. Assume a blank slate in upcoming education efforts. **The Funding Group (inc. DU, WMI, and ABC) will work on a consistent message and coordination; Rollie Sparrowe will respond to Rebecca Frank** (lead author of the letter from the JV Chairs).

During their meeting, the JV Management Board Chairs also discussed asking for a seat on the US NABCI Committee, but this is only a point for general consideration at this time pending a formal request. The US NABCI Committee could discourage, encourage, or take no current position on such a potential request. It was agreed that such a representative should be encouraged to attend upcoming US NABCI meetings to see how they might fit in, and further that participation in Subcommittees is open and encouraged. Potential expansion of the US NABCI Committee must be considered seriously, however, in that there are other sectors, such as game birds, that may be considered to be under represented as well. So, in general, the Committee does not discourage such an approach from the JV Chairs, but suggests that this be the start of careful deliberations. It was noted that, in order for such representation to take place, the JVs need to consider their potential status as some sort of Confederation from which a representative can be drawn. **D.Pashley will draft a letter to the JV Chairs reflecting this discussion.**

Federal Agency Budget Coordination

P. Schmidt - The Federal Agency Subcommittee has been working to achieve greater clarity and interaction among federal budgets as they refer to bird conservation, in response to a request from the NGO Subcommittee and the resolution to this effect passed by the US NABCI Committee at its last meeting. Four agencies (USFWS, USFS, USGS, and BLM) are working on inserting such language in their budget text.

R.Sparrowe commented that the following observations create the framework within which current funding discussions are taking place:

1) What will happen to agency budgets in the new Administration? This could create major change and dislocation - keeping bird conservation in the fray against background noise will be a challenge.

2) Therefore, we have a need and opportunity to educate regarding JVs, NAWCA, and

the good work of federal agencies for bird conservation.

3) There are two new \$50 million packages going to states for conservation. Decisions as to how to spend this and whether it will be available in future years are important.

4) The Neotropical Bird Bill passed, but without any money appropriated. This will be administered by the USFWS International Office. Many saw this as a start for NABCI and we need to work on a strategy for its development.

5) We must be cognizant of new faces and opportunities in the Administration and among Appropriations staff.

6) CARA will have another strong run.

In the discussion that followed, it was noted that Bush's campaign messages stressed taking care of what we have, including refuges, and research may be important as well - an opportunity is there. There are opportunities to educate, especially if we have a consistent message.

The NAWetlands Council discussion of administration of funds is tied into this. A. Wentz provided some background. New scoring criteria are under development, all related to the Council's desire to better judge wetland habitat projects. Staff have also been asked to prepare criteria for review of terrestrial proposals, should funding for such projects become available.

G. Myers represented Partners in Flight during the last Wetlands Council meeting during discussions about NAWCA expenditures and the future role of the Council. Myers expressed concern to the US NABCI Committee that this year's confusion (that is, whose money is it? should a portion go to upland projects? ect.) could be repeated in upcoming years without better communication and coordination now, ranging from working with DU and other groups during legislative visits to implementation through Joint Ventures and states. S. Sutherland commented that discussion of bifurcation of funds directly with Congress is likely to be counterproductive. R. Sparrowe agreed. Gary encouraged serious consideration of this issue in the near future and requested that a satisfactory solution be found. Gary will start conversations on this topic in the near future.

H. Raffaele - comments on the Neotropical Bird Bill: 80% is to be spent in Latin America and the Caribbean and 20% domestically. FWS wants to integrate implementation of this Act into ongoing initiatives, and discussions as to how to do this are underway. Continuity with existing Councils (as NAWCC) is desired, with increased input from those with Latin American experience needed. Others commended this move toward linkage, and stressed that, even though there are no appropriations now, the Act should be considered a potential core vehicle.

K. Williams noted continuity in USGS leadership in the new Administration, which means that it is clear that bird conservation will be a USGS priority for the next four years. Development of similar statements from other agencies as leadership becomes clear would be valuable.

In conclusion, **the US NABCI Committee endorses continuation of budget clarification efforts by the Federal Agency Subcommittee.**

Preparation for Queretero

D.Pashley reviewed the scheduled themes of the upcoming 14-16 February meeting, and suggested that additional discussion prior to that time would be beneficial, although time constraints prohibit full discussions of potential products from Mexico during this meeting. One area of particular importance that will be covered regards the international nature of bird conservation, a portion of which is considered under the following topic.

Role of G-3

P.Schmidt - About five years ago, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation starting assembling three representatives from each of the three countries (US, Canada, and Mexico) to consider development of a continental strategy for the conservation of migratory birds. This group was called the "G-9", with a "G-3" from each country (initially Schmidt, Myers, and Pashley from the US; Fenwick has since replaced Pashley). Although not working in a vacuum, this group conceived of NABCI and held the first international meeting of NABCI in Puebla, Mexico, in 1998. Now that NABCI is established in each country with National Committees or Councils, the role of the G-9 is now in flux. The current G-3 requests direction from the US NABCI Committee as to its role in the future.

The Federal Agency Subcommittee has suggested a broad role for the G-3, perhaps involving, in part, stimulating international assistance for bird conservation through entities such as multilateral funding organizations. The Subcommittee recommends formation of an International Working Group to consider this and other issues, including suggested roles of the G-3. **Ellie Brown will pull this working group together; G. Fenwick will represent the current G-3, D. Pashley will assist; J.Kushlan asked for Waterbird representation on this Working Group.**

The Trilateral Committee has existed for about five years as a means for federal wildlife agencies to work with each other regarding international issues. There is overlap between the Trilateral and the G-9, both in terms of staff and issues, and some confusion as a result. NABCI Canada is expected to make a strong recommendation that these two somehow become merged. There are many issues to consider in deciding whether to do this. First, the Trilateral must want this to occur (they meet 24-26 April in Ottawa). Second, the Trilateral as currently constituted is entirely federal, although it was noted that involvement of non-federal partners could be a very easy change to make. It was noted that even if the G-9 began meeting jointly with, as a part of, or as a single united entity with the Trilateral, the G-9 could still choose to meet at times independent of the once annual Trilateral meeting. Third, it was cautioned that consideration of moves toward consolidation with the Trilateral must weigh the reaction of the CEC - would such a change reduce the likelihood of continued CEC support for NABCI? Fourth, it was questioned whether affiliation with the Trilateral would reduce the capacity of US NABCI and perhaps NABCI in general to extend beyond the initial three countries. Finally, it was noted that the new

International WG should consider this among its relevant issues.

Species Conservation Assessment

D. Pashley - Representatives of the four initiatives met recently and decided to use the term “Species Conservation Assessment” in place of “Prioritization” to describe the biological parameters used to measure the conservation status of a bird in a particular place. This allows actual priorities to be set based upon both biological as well as other factors such as socio-economic status (including harvest) and legal status. This has greatly increased overall comfort level with the process, and a good deal of progress has been made in defining those biological parameters and establishing thresholds for scoring. More work remains, in that a means of evaluating a set of scores simultaneously has not been resolved. However, hard work, good will, and a willingness to compromise on behalf of all concerned bode well for the future of these discussions.

Lunch - Guest Speaker, Andrew Milliken - Coordinator, Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

Andrew Milliken summarized recent developments in the Atlantic Coast JV as an example of the positive impacts of NABCI related applications. Contact Andrew (andrew_milliken@fws.gov) for details.

Canada - the potential for an agricultural program similar to Conservation Reserve?

A.Wentz said that the Canadian government is considering changes in agricultural policy, and that DU is in favor of establishment of something comparable to CRP. S.Sutherland is meeting soon with Canadian officials on this topic. An expression of interest in such a development by the US G-3 could be useful.

Executive Order on Migratory Birds

P.Schmidt reported that this Executive Order was signed on Jan. 10, 2001. Section 3 of this document refers to the responsibility of federal agencies to enter into an MOU with the Fish & Wildlife Service. This has implications well beyond issues of “take”, in that there are references to habitat conditions and other factors much more central to the well-being of bird populations. NABCI, BCRs, and the initiatives and explicitly recognized in the EO as sources of details regarding the needs of birds that should be recognized in these MOUs. The EO calls for a Council to track progress.

The poor timing of the release of this EO was noted, as well as the lack of involvement of partners in its evolution. If the current Administration does not pressure agencies to participate,

there is no additional obligation to do so. This EO is a very positive thing, but there are challenges ahead regarding its application.

Business plans

D.Pashley summarized the background for this discussion. Each of the four initiatives was asked through a resolution passed by this Committee in Indianapolis to independently come up with a draft “Business plan” outlining the infrastructural support needed to keep the initiative healthy and productive for the next several years. The Committee also requested a similar description of the status and needs for BCR Coordinators. The intent was not for these drafts to be acted upon, but rather for them to serve as a point of departure for discussion as to areas of overlap where shared infrastructure would create economy as well as areas of individual need that all of the initiatives could work together through NABCI to try and fill. It is hoped that this will result in creation of a single statement of need or proposal for funding.

Text of the draft business plans is attached to these minutes. They were summarized in the meeting by:

S.Yaich - North American Waterfowl Management Plan (noting the existing infrastructure for the plan, but outstanding needs for science support).

J.Kushlan - North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (stressing need for waterbird coordinators in major resource agencies as well as in state agencies, perhaps merged there with shorebird responsibilities).

G.Myers - Partners in Flight (also noting the need for dedicated staff within state agencies).

S.Brown - United States Shorebird Conservation Plan (assuming that coordinated implementation will be a NABCI function, shorebird groups stress the need for support from technical staff. In general, there is a need for coordination of research needs among initiatives within NABCI, and there is currently no forum within which such discussions can occur).

D.Pashley - Bird Conservation Regions (stressing the contributions of the US Forest Service)

Discussion:

The next step is to try to coordinate commonalities and gain efficiencies of scale, then to translate staffing needs into dollars - this means working with initiatives to find agreement on common ground (which exists most obviously in areas such as communications and monitoring). An integrated plan has to balance the need to respect the autonomy of various initiatives while moving forward on the efficiencies. These needs should be translated into budget initiatives and pursued in the context of the coordinated Bird Funding Group/Joint Venture effort approach

A.Wentz noted that these needs don’t address the resources needed for implementation. This “business plan” is a first step toward a more comprehensive delivery plan. G.Fenwick opined that integration of the sort we are talking about will be easier to accomplish than we fear once we start putting more things on the ground. However, we are only thinking about pieces of what we need without going through the process of describing the universe of things needed for birds.

The pieces will make more sense once we construct the context within which they fit. H.Raffaele added that the infrastructural needs defined only very partially go beyond the borders of the United States - this is another contextual issue beyond what is currently being considered.

If we are going to turn this business plan effort into a proposal for Federal Aid, there is a call for urgency. We may not have until September to submit a proposal, as the process is likely to be accelerated this year. It is hoped that the Migratory Wildlife Committee can present this as its primary National Conservation Need to the IAFWA. S.Yaich quickly computed that the sum of the proposed operational needs seems to be about \$3 ½ million per year, and that a 1% surcharge on CARA could cover it. N.Edelson noted that this sort of thing had been discussed during CARA deliberations.

It was suggested that the time and room reserved for the Thursday before the North American Conference (March 15 at the Omni in DC) be used by representatives of the initiatives to sort through and merge the stated needs. In the meantime, a Group was formed to work on this in preparation for this meeting (D.Pashley, S.Mott, T.Rich, M.Steinkamp, S.Brown, L.Niles, K.Williams, and D.Davis). Dave Davis will begin working on describing shared needs immediately, and this group will meet in the Washington area on February 26. R.Sparrowe suggested that the group go beyond identifying needs and also identify likely sources for money to fulfill them.

D. Smith added for clarity that this is not an effort to integrate plans, this rather is an effort to coordinate funding needs for the plans.

Next meeting

There will be a workshop led by the above group, among initiatives, to further coordination of funding priorities. A room at the Omni is also reserved for Friday evening, March 16, for two hours. T.Melius will visit with co-chairs to determine the advisability of using this time, and a decision will be communicated soon.

Adjourn