

US NABCI Committee Meeting

Tasks and Summary

January 13-14, 2009

Arlington, Virginia

Committee members in attendance: Rowan Gould and Paul Schmidt (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), David Pashley (American Bird Conservancy), Catherine Hickey (U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan), Gary Myers (Partners in Flight), Geoffrey Walsh (for Dwight Fielder Bureau of Land Management), Greg Butcher (National Audubon Society), Terrell Erickson (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Jim Kushlan (Waterbird Conservation for the Americas), John Hoskins (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies), Chris Eberly (for Peter Boice Department of Defense), Dave Mehlman (The Nature Conservancy), Ken Williams (for Sue Haseltine U.S Geological Survey), Matt Ponish (Farm Service Agency), Elaine Leslie (for Bert Frost National Park Service), Dave Risley (for Dave Graham Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird WG), Breck Carmichael (Resident Game Bird WG), Scott Yaich (Ducks Unlimited)

Others: Deb Hahn (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies), Antoinette Condo (Department of State), Marcia Maslonek (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Guy Foulks (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Seth Mott (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Alicia King (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Charlie Rewa (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Jennifer Wheeler (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Skip Hyberg (Farm Service Agency)

The Committee agreed the purpose of meeting was to:

- **Assess and determine the future direction of the Committee,**
- **discuss progress on 2008 objectives, and**
- **plan dates for summer 2009 meeting.**

Next U.S. NABCI Committee Meeting

August 4, 5, and 6, 2009 are the recommended dates for the next meeting. A final date and time will be confirmed in the near future. Deb will work with Seth Mott and Guy Foulks to determine if it is possible to conduct an overlapping meeting with the Joint Ventures at this time.

Key Tasks from the meeting

- Deb Hahn - Include Marcia Maslonek on strategic planning group
- Committee members - Discuss World Bank opportunities with Martin Vargas and Ernesto Inkerling.
- Strategic planning working group - Conduct a conference call of the Strategic Planning Working Group on January 26 to outline a path forward.
- Strategic planning working group - Disseminate a draft planning document to the Committee in the first of March and a final document on April 1.

- Strategic planning working group - Conduct a Committee conference call in April to talk about strategic planning.
- Communications Subcommittee - Develop a strategy for communications with the support of Alicia King.
- Strategic planning working group - Develop a document for the BCFC based on the themes discussed at the meeting for use on the Hill by early February.
- Deb Hahn - Look at how NAPCI and American Wildlife Conservation Partners worked on policy and legislative issues as potential examples for how Committee can address them.
- Committee members - Email Alicia King (alicia_f_king@fws.gov) if a Committee member's organization would like to be more informed of the communication efforts surrounding the State of the Birds report.
- Dave Mehlman - Develop a process for updating the BCR map including whether to entertain the addition of marine BCRs and who beyond Committee members should be involved in the future. Dave Mehlman will lead this effort before the next meeting.

Strategic Planning Overview

At the last U.S. NABCI Committee (Committee) meeting, the members felt it was time to take a look at the future direction of the Committee. Some Committee members feel that NABCI accomplished what it originally intended to accomplish—laid out a framework for integrated bird conservation, developed a common planning unit called Bird Conservation Regions, helped influence wall to wall Joint Ventures (JVs), provided a forum for cross initiative and cross partner discussions, etc. The Committee has an annual work plan that has provided focused over the last few years. In January 2005, the Committee made a decision to increase its membership. The rationale was that from the start the members of the Committee included those whose missions was either solely or strongly focused on bird conservation (E.g., DU, USFWS, WMI, Bird Initiatives and JV representatives, etc.). This made for a small committee and an active committee. However, members acknowledged that in the changing environment with fewer resources available the bird community needed to reach out to those that did not have bird conservation as their sole mission but that could influence bird conservation and could bring additional resources to the table. Today we have a 21 member committee and its strength is the breadth and depth of its membership. In addition to some relatively new members, the work plan priorities are 3.5 years old and 2009 is the 10 year anniversary of the Committee. The landscape in which we conduct bird conservation is also extremely different than it was 10 years ago. There are many new challenges. Therefore, it is imperative that the Committee take a critical look at what its role and structure should be in this new landscape in order to add value and help the community as a whole reach our collective bird conservation goals.

With that in mind, a working group (Matt Ponish, Carol Lively, David Pashley, Ken Williams, and Catherine Hickey) was asked to recommend to the Committee at their January meeting a future direction for the Committee. The group worked via conference call, email and one in person meeting. They used the input the Committee provided at the August 2008 meeting, the views of the members of the working group and discussions with 6 Committee

members to develop their recommendation. The intent of the Committee member discussions was to get a general idea of what Committee member's thought.

The questions asked to each Committee member included the following

1. What value does NABCI bring to your organization or agency?
2. What do you want from NABCI? Is it or is it not meeting those needs?
3. What is the best way for NABCI to add value into the future? Do you think the Committee needs more measurable objectives?
4. What do you think about the following issues as potential future items NABCI should address – international conservation, farm bill, water issues, energy development, climate change

From the responses, it is clear that Committee members have some different ideas of what NABCI should be doing. Some see less value today than in the past; some see a need to always have NABCI no matter how the landscape changes, some see a key role in communication and others see a need to bring in players from outside of the bird community. Some see monitoring as a key issue that the Committee needs to continue to engage while others no longer see a role here. In general, members felt that the Committee needed more measurable goals and a new vision or focus for the next 3 to 5 years. They also felt that the Committee should focus on international conservation, policy, farm bill, and communication.

The Working Group also got input from the JVs at their December coordinators meeting. The JVs expressed a number of ideas about how the Committee could help JVs implement bird conservation and how to increase coordination between the Committee and the JVs. Most of the discussions focused on assistance with national and regional policy (E.g., Farm Bill), communication, legislation, and understanding expectations. Some key points are listed below along with specific ideas where NABCI could assist.

1. Communication and outreach
2. Farm Bill policy (data sharing, conservation practice for birds)
3. Funding and support on Capitol Hill
4. Research – How do we get key research topics funded?
5. Cross JV monitoring issues
6. Recommended a meeting between Coordinators and NABCI Committee
7. Help addressing spatial data and land cover issues so that they can accurately assess change.

Other issues to consider are those outlined in the PIF Needs Assessment. They include the following.

1. Monitoring – Data Management National Leadership, national monitoring coordination
2. Private Lands – Common Bird Conservation Objectives
3. Bird Conservation Community – Broaden the partnership, bring in non traditional partners
4. Communications – Help craft and deliver conservation messages

Committee Accomplishments

The Committee should be proud of the many things they have accomplished over the past 10 years. The Committee successfully pushed for wall-to-wall JVs; helped increase the political profile of bird conservation on the continent (Declaration of Intent between Canada, Mexico and US); produced the continentally important proposals and a national monitoring report; helped promote a culture shift to integrated bird conservation policies and implementation; helped improve bird initiative coordination; encouraged State level integrated bird partnerships; developed the BCR map; and supported one voice for bird conservation funding in Washington DC through the Bird Conservation Funding Coalition. Currently, the Committee is advancing bird conservation through communication, monitoring, and private lands. The Committee continues to grow and evolve based on what is needed.

Committee Member Feedback

With that background, Committee members were asked to come to the meeting prepared to discuss what they think the value of NABCI is and where they think it needs to go into the future. Listed below are key points from that discussion.

- There is a need and much value in embracing the State of the Birds report and advancing the messages from the report.
- The Committee is critical because the bird conservation community is large and complex. No one can attend all the meetings and interact with all the partners. There is a continuing need for a national coordinating body that brings consensus on issues.
- Funding continues to be critical. The Committee needs to revisit the funding priorities.
- Speak with one voice – The Committee's strength is its ability to speak with one voice and send clear messages. For example, if we are interested in additional bird conservation practices in the Farm Bill then we can build consensus on this. The Committee would like a new communications package or strategy to promote common messages across agencies. We still need consensus and communication on monitoring messages and needs too.
- We have been largely been unsuccessful in fundraising as an entity because the Committee has been uncomfortable getting involved in lobbying issues with federal

agency membership. That is why the Bird Conservation Funding Coalition (BCFC) was created. The BCFC has played an important role in maintaining funding levels over the last 5 or 6 years. We need to reconnect the Committee with the BCFC. Also, having the Director of the USFWS at the Committee meetings and hearing consensus on issues allows him/her to better advocate for migratory bird program funding.

- How do we integrate what we are doing with the JVs collectively? How do we increase the participation of all of our organizations/agencies in the JVs?
- The members of the Committee have authorities and resources at their disposal. The Committee itself does not have the authority and cannot control what the individual agencies and organizations do. The question is – how can the Committee help coordinate messages and resources and add value to the bird communities' collective goals? We have the ability to step back and make strong recommendations (E.g., wall to wall JVs) as a collective with a long term view.
- The start of a new Administration provides many opportunities to advance bird conservation and the Committee needs to take advantage of this.
- The Committee and NABCI as a whole are still babies. What do we want to be when we grow up? Are we ready to weigh in on key policy and funding issues? We need to determine what systems need to be in place to manage and conserve birds across the continent. The consequences of the BCR map and the monitoring report were large. Where can we make further substantial changes to how birds are conserved in this country?
- Is there a need for a national strategic plan for birds that could provide recommendations to agencies and organizations on areas to focus and work on NABCI priorities?
- Core Values of Committee members – The basic goal of NABCI is still the foundation of the Committee—to deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships. However, Committee members also expressed their personal passions and beliefs in the conservation of birds and the desire to effectively manage birds and meet organizational/agency/initiative missions. The members want to be a part of a partnership with a common voice.

Potential Future Focus Areas (The following sections will be used by the working group to further define the Committee's focus over the next 3 to 5 years.)

Joint Ventures

Funding and support on Capitol Hill is the number one need for the JVs. A number of other JVs needs were discussed at the JV coordinators meeting and are listed in the annotated agenda for the Committee meeting. Of this list some are technical in nature (E.g., modeling expertise, research etc.); others are thematic in nature (E.g., climate change, farm bill, habitat conservation); and finally communication is listed. The Committee cannot help with everything so they need to better understand the JV priorities. The following is a list of ideas that were discussed.

1. Support a 30 million funding level for JVs – This is needed to continue to improve strategic conservation design and work on climate change issues. We need to discuss this with the AJVMB.
2. Host the next meeting of NABCI with JV Coordinators and the AJVMB if there is interest – An invite should be sent to coordinators and management board chairs.
2. Increase our organizations/agencies participation in JV management boards.
3. Improve coordination between the Cooperative Research Units and the JVs.
4. Green jobs – How do we sell JVs in connection with the economic stimulus packages?
5. The JVs have demonstrated their ability to adapt and this is what we need to do to deal with climate change. We need to work with USGS to get detailed information on climate change impacts at the BCR level. We can promote this through the USGS climate change center and climate change legislation.
6. No matter what we do we need to understand the role of the JVs and how that fits in with what we work on and promote.

Legislation, Policy and Funding

The BCFC grew out of the Committee's NGO Subcommittee in 2003-2004. Their original priorities were developed by the entire community. For the past 5-6 years, they have taken those priorities to the Hill and to the Office of Management and Budget. The original priorities included NAWCA, JVs, science support in the USFWS, SWG, and the Neotrop Act. More recently the coalition added USFS and USFWS international programs. The Coalition works via consensus when deciding on priorities. They work with specific organizations (E.g., AFWA, DU, etc.) to come to agreement on the request for certain programs, produce a letter for signature and take the letter to Capitol Hill to promote the programs. The BCFC also connects to the Bird Conservation Alliance to garner grassroots support.

There are organizations and agencies on the Committee whose programs are not promoted but the Committee does not want the list to get so big that it is watered down. The Committee sees a need to reconnect to and increase communications between the Committee and the BCFC. The Committee could help reengage some NGOs in the BCFC through calls or letters to key individuals if necessary. Throughout the life of the BCFC, NGO involvement has varied depending on how bad the budget year is and on an organizations funding strategy and that is understandable. The Committee would like to look at its focus areas for the next 3 to 5 years and recommend priorities. The BCFC will make the final decision on priorities. The BCFC would support new priorities being discussed but wants to make sure the priorities are developed strategically. They also would consider repackaging their programs to fall under some themes such as science and monitoring; cooperative grants to leverage bird conservation funding; regional delivery; and international conservation. This would also allow them to touch on key programs such as the Farm Bill and wetlands to ensure their importance for bird conservation is known. A group of the Committee will look at the current priorities and repackage them for consideration by the BCFC. In the future, we will discuss our final recommendations at the January meeting and provide that information to the BCFC. The power is that we are representing national bird conservation organizations and have come to consensus on priorities.

Should the Committee engage in policy/legislation? The Farm Bill conservation program rules are being published. There is a push to reauthorize the NMBCA. There may be new Duck Stamp legislation and JV authorizing legislation. The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP) is coming forward and a new version of the Clean Water Restoration Act will most likely be reintroduced. To date the BCFC has focused on appropriations. If BCFC were to expand to include a policy arm it would need to add new functions and would need more resources. The Committee felt that it should agree to promote and develop white papers on issues but not directly lobby.

There are also policy opportunities with the new administration. The Committee would like to set up meeting with new leadership in federal agencies based on the Committee priorities. For example, they would like to meet with the Chief of NRCS and the FSA Administrator to talk about the conservation programs, recommendations for monitoring, strategic initiatives, etc. This is not lobby but coordination and recommendation. We could come with a consensus opinion on particular topics. Other examples might include EPA and a discussion on the facts about the importance of wetlands to birds. USGS and climate change are important discussions. John Hoskins has agreed to do some of these visits as his schedule allows. The intent would be to take the science we have about birds and our collective voice to the right folks to influence policy but not to make enemies or alienate partners.

International

There have been numerous successes in the tri-national arena. The border JVs are working within Canada and Mexico. There are strong Regional Alliances in some parts of Mexico. The partnership in the Yucatan is flourishing and working with TNC and Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. The Continentally Important Proposals are complete and are advancing locally and regionally. After the last Committee meeting, a group discussed World Bank and GEF funding for the proposals. The next step is for entities in Mexico to connect with the national focal point for the World Bank and show support for funding the proposals. Key government officials also need to be on board. Once that has happened we can pull together some support in DC. To date, there has been little success getting substantial new funding for the proposals.

The Committee felt that holding meetings with the NABCI Mexico Committee every now and then is a good idea. The last one was held in August 2007. They briefly discussed supporting the Southern Wings program in order to help it advance. There is also a need to find small pots of money to fund Mexico partner travel to specific meetings.

Monitoring

The Subcommittee produced an integral report to advance monitoring. There is a significantly different mindset and way to think about monitoring throughout the community. The NE Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership has been a success. The Committee supported the development of their monitoring handbook. However, we still do not have the necessary coordination or funding of monitoring. We also do not have our data secure and we do not have national database management standards. The idea of a monitoring program assessment has been discussed in the past. However, the sheer number of program (E.g., 430 programs in the northeast) and the aversion to the idea of an

assessment ended the discussions. The Subcommittee has tried to encourage agencies and organizations to do self assessments instead. The NE Partnership decided to inspire folks to improve programs as opposed to assess their programs. The KY Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and the Central Hardwoods JV have developed a draft report card that maybe useful to other states and agencies to do internal reviews. The Subcommittee will be reviewing the report card. The Committee's role should be to continue creating the monitoring vision like was done with the report. We could promote a vision of wall to wall regional monitoring coordinators. We need to speak with one voice and connect this to climate change which is the driver.

Communications

The questions are—who do we want to reach? what do we want to say? what do we want to accomplish with our communication? do we want to promote NABCI or promote the ideas? do we need to communicate internally within the committee, internally within the bird community, externally to the wildlife community as a whole or to the general public? If the Committee gets more involved in funding and legislation then the Committee may want to communicate to the general public. However, the Committee does not feel that the general public is their principle audience. There is more value in communicating with one voice to key people and there is a need to communicate more effectively together and within our organizations and agencies about NABCI. It would be helpful to have communication pieces to distribute internally to our agencies and organizations after Committee meetings. The State of the Birds report is an opportunity to communicate around a set of messages and the state of our birds at a national level. We have not yet fulfilled our communication goals to federal agencies, state agencies, and NGOs. If we communicate effectively with those groups we would be a success because they communicate with the public.

The website is in need of revamping. We want folks at to have a website to go to that is user friendly. There are 50 or 60 key people in DC that need general public type information and there are elected officials that need this type of information also. What about the agencies whose primary mission is not birds? We need to communicate to these organizations and agencies. The main message is that we want to “speak with one voice.”

2008 Work Plan

Private lands

Update: The National Wildlife Federation sued FSA. As a result, FSA has determined that it is required to conduct NEPA analysis on rules. This is postponing the publishing of rules by a year or more. The public can comment on EIS's and EAs as they are released. There are some commodities programs that have impact on birds that are being released. Many of the NRCS rules are being released now and over the next month. They did consider the objectives of wildlife initiatives in the NRCS rules.

Do to a recent lawsuit USDA has limited the release of data. FSA and NRCS have interpreted this decision differently. Since October 1, a partner must have an MOU with FSA to allow them to release any data. For example, each state will need an MOU that

identifies what can be done with the data. FSA recommends that individual states contact their state office to start the process. This will also affect CP33 monitoring. NRCS is still sharing this information but they are developing a process to deal with data sharing restrictions.

Strategic Habitat Initiatives and Farm Bill Guide: The two tasks that the Subcommittee continues to advance are strategic habitat initiatives and biologist capacity, and the wildlife conservationist's guide to the farm bill. NRCS and AFWA are conducting surveys to determine what the biological capacity of NRCS and partner biologists is. So far it looks like NRCS has lost 26 biologist positions since 2007. The Farm Bill guide has been delayed by the rule making process but it continues to advance.

Communications

10 year Anniversary: NABCI and the Committee turn 10 years old in 2009. The Committee developed a 10 year anniversary brochure at the end of 2008. They would like it distributed the North American conference and other venues. Once the future planning is complete they would like to send the brochure and a letter to partners informing them of the Committee 3 to 5 year direction and goals. The brochure will also go on the website. The Committee feels this is also a good year to go back to the State Regional Associations. The meetings are this summer and fall. A state agency Committee member and the USFWS will go and talk about where the Committee has been, where it is going and the State of the Birds report.

Awards: The award nominees were announced and supported by the Committee.

State of the Birds: The Committee was introduced to the concept in January 2008 and gave their support and blessing. They asked that some Committee members be intimately involved. Those members were Dave Mehlman, David Pashley, and Greg Butcher. They also received a presentation from Richard Gregory about the UK state of the birds report. The report is near completion. It will be rolled out at the North American. The first press conference announcing the report will be held before that. Most of the Committee members have individuals participating including members from each initiative. For members that want a more direct link to the communication efforts email Alicia King (alicia_f_king@fws.gov) with a contact name for a member of your organization or agency that would like to be involved. The request made to the Committee was to make the informal working group an official Subcommittee of the US NABCI Committee. The Committee agreed to this.

International

Bird Conservation Region (BCR) map Recommendation – The recommendation for maintaining and updating the map is as follows.

1. In the future, each national Committee will be the recipient of requests for changes to the map. If the potential changes are only national in scope then the national committee will determine if the changes are worthwhile and needed. If the potential changes are bi or tri-national then the Tri-national Committee should make the final

decision on whether to accept the changes. Each national Committee may only want to address requested changes once they have more than one to address depending on the amount of time it takes.

2. Bird Studies Canada has agreed to house the map and make small changes when necessary. If a major revision was to take place that would require a contract and funding.
3. Each national Committee will gather information on what minor changes have been made to the map and what changes are recommended so that we have an accurate account of past changes and future desired changes. Most of these are probably in the U.S.

The Committee was supportive of Bird Studies Canada housing and making minor updates to the map. However, they were uneasy soliciting changes to the map without a process and criteria for change. They would like to lay out a more transparent process for soliciting and making changes. Dave Mehlman will spearhead this discussion before the next meeting.

Tri-national Committee Recommendation: The recommendation is as follows. The Tri-national Committee believes it has completed its tasks as identified, including a meeting with the Mexico NABCI Committee in 2007 and completion of the 5 Continentally Important Proposals. The proposals are well established to seek local, regional, national and international funding as appropriate; however, the Tri-national Committee has not secured any large pots of money to fund the proposals. The Tri-national Committee recommends that it communicate in person, via conference call or email as needed when issues and tasks arise. The Tri-national Committee will continue to be the international arm of NABCI. The national Coordinators in each country will keep in close contact and Tri-national Committee members will discuss new opportunities and projects as appropriate. The U.S. NABCI Committee agreed to the recommendation.

Tri-national Committee membership: Gary Myers is stepping down from the Committee and the Tri-national Committee because he is retiring. John Hoskins offered Dave Erickson of Missouri Department of Conservation as a replacement for Gary on the Tri-national Committee. The Committee accepted.

Other Topics

Partnership for Southern Forestland Conservation: Gary Myers described the partnership and expressed a desire for the Committee to consider the partnership and the issues it is addressing in future discussions.