

## U.S. NABCI Committee Meeting Tasks and Summary January 12-13, 2010 Arlington, Virginia

**Committee members in attendance:** Catherine Hickey (U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan), 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), Dave Mehlman (The Nature Conservancy, Skip Hyberg (for Matt Ponish, Farm Service Agency), Jennifer Lee (for Bert Frost, National Park Service), Sam Hamilton and Paul Schmidt, (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Laurie Osterndorf (for Matt Frank, Partners in Flight), Carol Lively (U.S. Forest Service), Sue Haseltine and Ken Williams (U.S. Geological Survey), David Pashley (American Bird Conservancy), Scott Yaich (Ducks Unlimited), Chris Eberly (Department of Defense), Cal DuBrock (Resident Game Bird Working Group)

**Other participants:** Deb Hahn (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies); Brad Andres, Guy Foulks, Seth Mott, Alicia King, Bob Blohm, Jennifer Wheeler, Roxanne Bogart, and Elena Babij (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); Antoinette Condo (State Department); Jim Ingles (Pheasants Forever); Steve Hilburger, Laurie Allen and Graham Smith (U.S. Geological Survey); Anne Law (American Bird Conservancy); Gabe Horner, (The Nature Conservancy); Caroline Kennedy (Defenders of Wildlife); Ron Regan (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies)

### **Purpose of January 2010 meeting:**

- **discuss progress on 2009 objectives,**
- **finalize tasks and priorities to support the Joint Ventures,**
- **decide on recommendations to advance 2010 tasks,**
- **determine resources needed to complete 2010 tasks, and**
- **plan dates for summer 2010 meeting.**

### **Next U.S. NABCI Committee Meeting**

TBD – Deb will send out a Doodle survey to assess the best dates in August 2010.

### **Tasks from the meeting**

- Deb Hahn – Finalize summary from U.S. NABCI Committee meeting
- Deb Hahn – Determine dates for August meeting
- Deb Hahn – Work with the Policy and Legislative Subcommittee, State of the Birds Subcommittee and others to finalize the meeting schedule that will be a high priority of the Chair over the next year.

- Deb Hahn - Contact Casey Stemler to get more information about JV data needs. Talk with Elena Babij about data sharing efforts in DOI.
- Deb Hahn and Paul Schmidt – Write a letter to the LCC leads that calls attention to the SWAPs, initiatives, and JVs. The letter will copy regional Directors and initiative leads.
- Federal Agency members – Contact Deb if you would like to set up a meeting between John and your agency. Provide information on what issues should be discussed and what the objectives of the meeting should be.
- Cal DuBrock - Contact the Flyway Council Chairs to determine if an assessment or voluntary contribution by the states through the Flyway process is feasible.
- Paul Schmidt - Convene a meeting or conference call of the Federal agency NABCI members to talk about how the federal portion of Coordination funding will be allocated.
- Paul Schmidt – Provide a presentation on NABCI and NABCI priorities at the next meeting of the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds.
- Policy Legislative Subcommittee- Send a letter to Representative Oberstar to encourage passage of the CWRA.
- Policy Legislative Subcommittee - Update the Committee on the status of priority policy and legislation and work with the Chair to identify meetings and opportunities to engage in the LCC, CWRA and LWCF discussions.
- Committee – provide Robert Skorkowsky with federal agency contacts that he could call and discuss participation in the monitoring program.
- State of the Birds – Consider recommendations for participation by the National Park Service.
- State of the Birds – Consider and incorporate Committee comments on 2010 draft report
- State of the Birds - Determine the 2011 report theme with consideration of the discussions held at the Committee meeting.
- Monitoring Subcommittee – Review the draft NRCS Monitoring and Evaluation Standard.
- Monitoring Subcommittee – Add a citation to the *Data Management Best Practices and Standards for Biodiversity Data Applicable to Bird Monitoring* document that shows a clear link to NABCI.
- Monitoring Subcommittee – Develop a proposal for USFWS on LCCs and data management and also one for FSA.
- Private Lands Subcommittee - Review NRCS Practice Standards in 2010.

**NABCI Coordination Funding:** The vast majority of the funding for coordination has been secured through December 31, 2010. The USGS, USFS, and USFWS have been a consistent supporter of Coordination to date and do not see that changing. Based on discussions at the last meeting, a draft funding plan for NABCI Coordination was developed by Greg Butcher. Important considerations and comments are below.

1. The state agencies believe they could broaden the state agency contributions; however, they have limitations that are state specific. For example some states are unable to send money beyond their borders.
2. Although additional federal agencies would like to provide support, federal funds would not be evenly distributed across agencies.
3. NGOs will only be able to contribute a small amount in the near term.
4. The initiatives could talk to their members/Councils but they do not have budgets and wouldn't likely be able to contribute.
5. The Committee could look to the Multi-state grant process as a potential funding source.

Outcome: The Committee agreed to a 70% federal and 30% NGO/State split for funding support starting in 2011. The details of where this money comes from will need to be worked out.

Actions: Cal DuBrock will contact the Flyway Council Chairs to determine if an assessment or voluntary contribution by the states through the Flyway process is feasible. Paul Schmidt will convene a meeting or conference call of the Federal agency NABCI members to talk about how the federal portion will be allocated.

**Chair's Agenda/Priorities for the next 6 months** - John's Hoskins retires from the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) in January 2010. However, he will be on contract with MDC through April 2011. During this time he will be able to devote some time to NABCI priorities.

Discussion: The Committee agreed in general to the draft priorities presented. However, they felt that Coordination funding should be added to the list. The key is not to sell NABCI but to sell the issues or concepts of NABCI that are critical to integrated bird conservation. More details will be added to the priorities document once the Committee discusses Policy and Legislative issues, State of the Birds, and Joint Ventures later on the agenda. If the Chair attends appropriations meetings he will not lobby but provide information on the State of the Birds, monitoring and conservation needs. Meetings regarding the State of the Birds report could include promotion of state and federal wildlife adaptation funding in climate change legislation. There is new federal agency leadership. They need to better understand integrated conservation and the concept that birds are good indicators of environmental change. It will be important to talk to them about how they support NABCI goals/objectives and how NABCI can support their goals/objectives. Subcommittee chairs should consider their needs and report back to John. It will be important to limit the discussion to a handful of issues that are chosen strategically to get the most out of each meeting. The Committee would like other Committee members to have these types of discussions at meetings such as the regional state association meetings.

Outcome: The Committee approved the priorities for the Chair with edits recommended by the Committee.

Action(s): A final priorities document will be distributed and include items from the policy and legislative, State of the Birds, Joint Ventures discussions. A timeline will be developed for 2010 so that we can set up the necessary meetings. Federal Agencies that would John to meet with their agency should let him know and also provide information on what the objectives and needs are.

**Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds** - Executive Order 13186 (2001) directs federal executive departments and agencies to take certain actions to further implement the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The Order also directs the establishment of a Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds to oversee implementation, share resource information, develop annual reports, foster partnerships, and select an annual recipient of a Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award. The first Council for Migratory Bird Conservation met on December 3, 2009. The Secretary of Interior established the Council to consist, at a minimum, of one Director level representative from each Federal agency who has signed or is developing a MOU with the Service in accordance with the Executive Order. The charter will be finalized after February 1, 2010. Agencies represented at the meeting included the following—DOD, DOE, USFWS, MMS, BLM, NPS, APHIS – WS, NRCS, FERC, FAA, FEMA, Coast Guard, Corps of Engineers, FCC, EPA, FSA, Federal Highways, NOAA, and USGS. The next meeting will be in November/December 2010.

Discussion - The MOUs do not contain details but are the framework to address conservation measures for the take of migratory birds. This is a venue for federal agencies only, however; concerns and priorities of NABCI and the conservation community could be shared with this Council. At the next meeting, they should present on NABCI and NABCI priorities and we should think about how NABCI products and priorities can help engage more federal agencies in migratory bird conservation.

Action: Present NABCI and NABCI priorities at the next Council meeting.

**State of the Birds Report** - The Subcommittee membership includes the science team—Brad Bortner, Robert Blohm, Brad Andre, Jennifer Wheeler, Jorge Coppen, John Sauer, Greg Butcher, Laurel Barnhill, Deb Hahn, David Pashley, Ken Rosenberg, Charles Francis, Frank Thompson, Dan Petit, and Paul Schmidt and the communications team—Nancy Severance, Alicia King, Ashley Dayer, Steve Holmer, and Miyoko Chu. A draft of the 2010 State of the Birds report was sent to the Committee for review and comment on December 26, 2009.

Discussion – The Subcommittee focused on their area of expertise and assessed the vulnerability of birds to change. The USGS wants the team to be cautious because the climate models and forecasts are uncertain. It is important to have this type of assessment and the document is very compelling. The Committee wants to be sure that the audience understands what action they can take and that there is not too much science for policy makers. The balance for the team is to write to policy makers but also maintain credibility. The science might not need to be in the report but it needs to be somewhere. The Waterbird Conservation for the Americas encourages the Subcommittee to consider publishing the science from the 2009 report in peer reviewed journals so that we can advance the science

and in 5 years be ready for the next comprehensive report. The Committee would like to encourage the Subcommittee to look at the timeline and allow for more review in the future.

The Committee also considered topics for the 2011 report. A list of potential themes included— international considerations (wintering grounds connections), grasslands, oceans and islands, energy development, agriculture, invasive species, grassland/aridland, wetlands, land use policy and development/sprawl. The Committee thought one option would be to follow the recommendations of the 2009/2010 report that highlighted seabirds and address oceans/islands. Other perspectives thought that the Subcommittee should look at land use change and think about management recommendations. If policy makers are the audience then policy topics should be the focus. Since there will be a 2012 reauthorization of the Farm Bill then agriculture is critical. Another take is to look at a biome and consider how policy issues (energy, invasives, etc.) are impacting that biome.

Outcome(s): The Committee endorses the draft document with the knowledge that their comments will be considered and incorporated.

Action(s): Committee members will send comments by COB January 14, 2010. National Park Service is interested in getting involved and will contact the Subcommittee Chairs. If Committee members have other comments on 2011 report themes, they will send those to Deb ASAP. The Committee asked that the Subcommittee take into account their discussion and make a final recommendation.

**Policy and Legislative Subcommittee** – The Subcommittee was asked to update the Committee on key policy and legislative issues and provide briefing papers on the issues that outline potential Committee actions. The Committee will discuss each issue and consider what if any action they would like to take.

*Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC)* (Sam Hamilton) – The USFWS realizes that all species conservation is difficult because the science is complicated and that it will inevitably overlap with other efforts, however, in the context of climate change there needs to be a continental approach so that species can migrate and adapt. In 2010, the USFWS and USGS will fund 8 LCCs. There will be 6 in the contiguous 48 states, 1 in Alaska, and 1 in Hawaii. The LCCs have been well received both in Canada and within federal agencies. USGS has developed regional climate centers and they will be hard wired into the LCCs.

Discussion: The Committee is concerned about the future of the Joint Ventures (JVs) and their funding. It is not clear what the best path is for the JVs especially for those with very different geographic boundaries than the LCCs. NABCI has always pushed a North American framework for bird conservation. The Committee hopes that the guidance given to the regions on LCC development will ensure that they are integrated and working together even if they are not geographically near one another. The USFWS wants this to be driven by a partnership and not just the USFWS and USGS. The focus of the LCCs will be on planning and science information that land managers can use.

*Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA)* (Scott Yaich) - Two recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions (*SWANCC* in 2001 and *Rapanos/Carabell* in 2006) have had the effect of confusing administration of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and dramatically narrowing federal CWA jurisdiction over wetlands and waters of the U.S. The net effect was that the post-SWANCC guidance withdrew CWA protections from an estimated 20 million acres of geographically isolated wetlands across the U.S. CWA protection of several tens of millions of additional wetlands also became unclear. The post-Rapanos guidance withdrew CWA protections from an additional indeterminate but significant acreage of wetlands and tens of thousands of miles of streams, particularly ephemeral streams, and wetlands adjacent to them. Only approximately 100 million acres of wetlands remain in the U.S. (~50% of what was originally present), and CWA protections, once the primary mechanism of wetland protection in the U.S., have now been administratively withdrawn from a majority of them as well as most of the stream miles in the U.S.

Discussion: We need to promote a better understanding of what CWRA would do and how it would help wildlife in order to persuade policy makers and the public that it needs to be done. The important concept is that if you didn't need a permit in 2001 you won't need one under CWRA. One concern is that this may compromise the ability of the state agencies to implement State Wildlife Action Plans.

*Land and Water Conservation Fund* (Tom Cassidy, TNC) - Established by Congress in 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is the principal source of federal funds to purchase land for national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests and other federal public lands. LWCF makes it possible for the federal land management agencies to buy critical in holdings and buffer lands from willing sellers. Funded through the Department of Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill, LWCF has helped protect some of America's most important protected areas for birds including Hawaii's James Campbell NWR, critical waterfowl habitat in the Cache River NWR, and waterfowl and grassland bird habitat in the Prairie Potholes. The companion LWCF State Assistance Program can help states protect additional bird habitat in community parks and recreation areas although it is not focused on wildlife conservation. In spite of the program's successes, it has only been fully funded twice during the program's 40-year history.

Discussion: The Obama Administration has promised to fully fund LWCF in 5 years and continues to ask for increases. There are many Senators and Representatives that support full funding. There is an LWCF Coalition that supports S2747 that was introduced by Senator Baucus and Senator Bingaman. In Wisconsin, some of the money spent for recreation does translate to habitat. However, the bulk of the LWCF funds do not go to the wildlife agencies and do not support wildlife habitat, therefore; the community needs more than full funding of the LWCF to meet our wildlife conservation goals.

Ocean's Policy and Marine Spatial Planning – The Subcommittee will look at this issue in the future. A draft briefing paper that has not been fully vetted through the Subcommittee was provided for the Committee's information.

Outcomes: The Committee would like to promote the importance of birds and JVs in the development of LCCs. The Committee agreed to the recommendation in the CWRA

briefing paper (...the NABCI Committee endorse passage of the CWRA as a high priority policy issue and that its members commit to participating in a broad partnership to disseminate information about the impacts of wetland loss on the nation's bird populations and other natural resources and restore CWA protection of wetlands and other waters to the levels that existed before 2001.) The Committee agreed to the recommendation in the LWCF briefing paper (... the Committee endorses full funding of LWCF as a high priority policy issue and that its members commit to compiling information about the importance of LWCF for protecting bird habitat and, to the extent possible, support legislative efforts (such as S 2747, the Land and Water Reauthorization and Funding Act, and HR 3534, the Consolidated Land, Energy, and Aquatic Resources Act ) to guarantee full and permanent funding for LWCF.)

**Actions:** The Committee will send a letter to Representative Oberstar to encourage passage of the CWRA. The Subcommittee will update the Committee on the status of priority policy and legislation and work with the Chair to identify meetings and opportunities to engage in the LCC, CWRA and LWCF discussions.

**Bird Conservation Funding Coalition -** The Bird Conservation Funding Coalition (Coalition) was developed in 2005 in response to a meeting spearheaded by the Wildlife Management Institute that identified the top 5 funding priorities for bird conservation (NAWCA, Neotrop Act, Joint Ventures, SWGs, and USFWS science support). The Coalition formed out of the NGO Subcommittee of the Committee. Therefore, the Coalition is linked to the Committee but not directly connected to the Committee. The purpose of the Coalition is to lobby on key bird conservation issues.

**Discussion:** It is a difficult year for funding. Health care and job creation are the most important issues. Since this is an election year increases in appropriations will be a challenge. The BCFC requests are as follows. Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program (6.5M), Joint Ventures (18M), USFWS Migratory Bird Management (35.039M), North American Wetlands Conservation Act (52.6M), State Wildlife Grants (115M), FWS International Affairs (22M), USDA Forest Service (16M).

**Monitoring -** The Subcommittee's focus in 2009 has been used to advance Goal 4 of the NABCI Monitoring Report—to secure key bird conservation databases—because of the request made by the Committee to look at this issue. The Subcommittee realizes that this is only 1 of the 4 Goals of the Monitoring Report and that there are still many other monitoring issues to tackle. The data management goal was addressed first because much data has already been collected but is inaccessible, poorly documented, incomplete, or under-utilized, all which hamper our ability to make informed decisions about bird conservation and management.

**Discussion:** The Committee endorses the best management practices document (*Data Management Best Practices and Standards for Biodiversity Data Applicable to Bird Monitoring*) but would like to see a citation and clear link to NABCI. The database management funding priorities document (*Meeting the Challenges for Data Management for Bird Conservation*) was developed because the Committee asked for a list of the needs and is not a funding proposal. However, the Subcommittee can develop funding proposals if there is interest. There is

interest in seeing a proposal for what could be done for \$1 Million in connection with LCCs and also a proposal that FSA could use. They would like to know what they could do better by spending money on database management and why we all should be working together to improve data management. The Committee would like to see the needs also consider virtual and spatial needs and tools to share data. Decision makers need to know what is in it for them – what can they do after they spend that money that they cannot do now. The Committee supported the idea of connecting with the LCCs at a regional and national level and would like to see a proposal. The Committee also supported the recommended tasks for 2010 for the Subcommittee including conducting a national meeting on monitoring recommendations.

Robert Skorkowsky presented about an integrated monitoring program at the Bird Conservation Region (BCR) level. The program used the 2007 NABCI monitoring report and has focused on Goal 3—improving statistical design. Partners involved in several of these existing bird monitoring programs met in August 2007 to review the existing long-term bird monitoring programs and work towards aligning bird monitoring programs with the goals and recommendations of the 2007 NABCI report. At the August 2007 meeting, a decision was made to change the Monitoring Colorado Birds program to align with the recommendations in the NABCI report. During the 2008 field season, this change was implemented. The program is scalable which is important for receiving funding from agencies and organizations that work at different scales. In 2009, they expanded to BCR 17 and into all of WY. It was also adopted in the Northern Great Plains JV. It is funded through a partnership of states, NGOs and agencies although the USFS provides the bulk of funding. They will continue to make this presentation throughout the bird conservation community and are planning a workshop on April 5-6 in Salt Lake City. They plan on broadening the invitations to this workshop to include NABCI Monitoring Subcommittee members, LCC representatives and maybe representatives of other taxa also.

**Outcomes:** The Committee endorses the best management practices document (*Data Management Best Practices and Standards for Biodiversity Data Applicable to Bird Monitoring*) but would like to see a citation and clear link to NABCI. The Committee thanks the Monitoring Subcommittee for their hard work on this and the great products they produced.

**Actions:** Committee members will provide Robert Skorkowsky with contacts within their federal agencies that he could call and talk about participation in the monitoring program. The Committee endorses the best management practices document (*Data Management Best Practices and Standards for Biodiversity Data Applicable to Bird Monitoring*) but asks that a citation be added to the document that shows a clear link to NABCI.

The Committee would like a proposal developed that is directed to the USFWS on LCCs and data management and also one for FSA.

## **International**

*Continentially Important Proposals* – Information on the five Continentially Important Proposals that is available on the website includes an Introduction/Overview and a two-page summary (<http://www.nabci-us.org/trinationalprojects.htm>). One of the proposals focuses on trinational grasslands conservation. The 2009 State of the Birds report identified the grasslands bird as among the fastest and most consistently declining birds in North America. A

proposal was submitted to the Commission of Environmental Cooperation (CEC) and was accepted. The proposal supports grassland conservation in Mexico that will be complimented by funds from the Canadian Wildlife Service. The Mexican government agency, CONABIO, is the lead agency. The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) will implement the monitoring and mapping objectives of the project. A meeting was held in December 2009 to engage more partners in the project. Next steps were outlined and additional partners were invited such as TNC and NFWF. At the meeting, the partnership agreed to develop a regional alliance. They are in the process of hiring Juan Carlos Guzman, who is associated with Profauna in Mexico, as coordinator. The role of the regional alliance will be to formulate a common vision for conservation, provide a forum for consensus building, and provide a mechanism to take action. The boundary will include the Chihuahua and Sonoran desert ecoregion and there will be coordination with cross-border JVs. The formation of the regional alliance will be the main objective in 2010. Also in 2010 the partnership will need to consider funding beyond 2010. The CEC is going to continue funding the project in 2010 and we hope, through its current strategic planning process, beyond 2010. Other Continentally Important Proposal areas have also continued to advance. Also, the partners in El Triunfo have met with Brian Smith, Appalachian Mountains JV and Bob Altman, Pacific Coast JV to talk about future projects. The partnership in the Yucatan is much stronger now and has received grants to develop their regional alliance.

*BCR Map Updates* - The Committee received 3 requests for changes from the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas and the Gulf Coast Joint Venture. The review team will provide the Committee with a final recommendation by February 28, 2010. We also received a request for an extension from the Oaks and Prairies and Lower Mississippi Valley JV that was granted until March 1.

Discussion: The Marine BCRs are based on international boundaries from other organizations and are similar to the IUCN map. They went through an extensive process to develop marine BCRs. They have spoken to Bird Studies Canada (who houses the official BCR map) and other than a few minor tweaks the GIS layers are complete. There is interest in making sure that the Pacific Islands LCC and the Marine BCRs compliment each other. The Committee wants to ensure that there is communication with NABCI in Mexico and Canada on the marine BCRs.

*Canada NABCI Update* - The Environment Canada (EC) recently hired Sarah Wren as their new NABCI Coordinator. Sarah comes from Nature Canada, one of Canada's BirdLife International partners. The bulk of their activity in the past year has been the ongoing development of wall-to-wall Bird Conservation Region (BCR) Plans. Each plan is based on seven elements that include: identification of priority species based on the four bird initiative plans, summarizing their habitat requirements, developing population objectives, flagging conservation issues, formulating conservation objectives, recommending actions, and identifying and prioritizing sites or areas for conservation action. They expect to have a complete full set of first draft BCR plans by September 2010. At the last Canada NABCI meeting partners from the Province of Nova Scotia, the Forest Products Association of Canada and Bird Studies Canada/Nature Canada (as our BirdLife partners) presented on how they are working on NABCI priorities and towards the eventual implementation of BCR plans.

*Mexican NABCI Update* – none at this time

*Saving Our Shared Birds: The PIF Tri-national Vision* – This discussion was tabled because the presenter was not able to attend.

Outcomes: The Committee supports the inclusion of Marine BCRs as long as there is support from NABCI in Canada and Mexico.

**Joint Venture Discussions** - A face to face meeting between JV coordinators and management board members and the U.S. Committee was held in August 2009 to define JV priorities and U.S. Committee tasks to help meet those priorities. The objective of this discussion was to finalize the U.S. Committee priorities/tasks for the next 3 to 5 years to support and partner with Joint Ventures in the delivery of integrated bird conservation.

Discussion: The Committee reviewed the draft document- *Tasks Identified at the NABCI Joint Venture Meeting in August 2009*. There comments were as follows.

- We need to move quickly if we are going to support the JVs on tasks related to renewable energy development.
- There is a need to update communications information about Joint Ventures so that more people understand what they are and support them. The information would be useful to put on a senior VP of Audubon's desk and give to state and federal agencies during meetings.
- Promotion of the JVs will be a priority during meetings of the Chair and other members of the Committee
- The tasks document needs to be updated to reflect LCC considerations.
- The Committee would like to have more information on the data sharing needs and discussions so that USGS and others can help advance this. Now that Landsat data is available some of this may be solved. The Director of the USGS has 5 top priorities and one is satellite data. If we can show the need we may be able to help the JVs. There are also some new data sharing efforts going on in DOI.

Outcomes: The Committee supports the task identified in the document with the edits and comments included in the bullets above.

Actions: Deb will contact Casey Stemler to get more information about JV data needs. Deb will talk with Elena Babij about data sharing efforts in DOI. The Committee will send a letter to the LCC leads to call attention to the SWAPs, initiatives, and JVs. The letter will copy regional directors and initiative leads. USFWS will help draft the letter.

Private lands – The main focus of the Subcommittee has been on increasing capacity to deliver Farm Bill conservation programs. The Subcommittee prepared a white paper outlining needs, opportunities, and objectives for continuing to build the capacity necessary to harness the wildlife potential of the Farm Bill. The White Paper and a glossy one pager ([http://www.nabci-us.org/pvtlands\\_biocapacity.html](http://www.nabci-us.org/pvtlands_biocapacity.html)) was presented to and discussed with the Chief of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on August 5 and also with

Regional Conservationists' on January 11. A meeting was held with NFWF on January 13, 2010.

The Subcommittee will participate in a review of the national Practice Standards in 2010. Eighteen standards are up for review including the 3 wetland standards, early successional habitat, rare and declining species, and upland wildlife management practice. There is also a new practice standard for Monitoring and Evaluation because NRCS can now use Technical Assistance money for monitoring.

Leslie Deavers, NRCS, provided updates on Farm Bill conservation programs and related issues.

- One of the 3 priorities of Chief White is partnerships. The 2009 conservation programs were well funded (i.e., 1.9 Billion for conservation programs in 2007 and 2.3 Billion in 2009). Although the numbers are not final, they expect to have less money in 2010. This is in part because NRCS did not spend all the 2009 money especially in WHIP. This further emphasizes the critical role partners play in delivering their programs.
- Because of the current emphasis on the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) they have a goal of enrolling 300,000 acres a year and an implementation plan to make this happen.
- In the farm and rangeland protection programs up to 2/3 of the property can be forest. Fifteen percent of land enrolled in the program currently is either wetland or forest land that are under permanent easements.
- They published interim rules and the final rules are in various stages of completion. The Healthy Forest Program rules will come out next along with the Technical Service Providers. They will most likely be followed by WHIP.
- There is a waiver provision for the WRP programs 7 year ownership requirement. They didn't receive many waiver requests
- The Mississippi River Basin Initiative's purpose is to improve the health of Mississippi River basin. Restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitat is one goal. They will use both EQIP (20M) and WHIP (5M) to implement the program. The request for proposals will be sent out soon. Information on the Initiative and a map of the 41 focus areas are on their website ([www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/mrbi/mrbi\\_overview.html](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/mrbi/mrbi_overview.html)). NRCS needs assistance with monitoring of the success of the practices and needs help delivering those practices. The national ranking for WHIP was revised to address priorities of national plans like NAWMP and SWAPS.
- The RFP for Conservation Innovation Grants will be released soon. The program focuses on new technologies and new science. Wildlife monitoring techniques could be part of it. Projects have typically been for 100K-500k. More information can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html>.
- Another initiative is the Sage Grouse Initiative. Money will be set aside in WHIP and EQIP to focus on Sage Grouse. Monitoring assistance will be provided by the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP).

Charlie Rewa, NRCS, reported on the wildlife portion of CEAP. They continue to work closely with the bird community and especially the Joint Ventures (JVs). CEAP has contributed about \$800,000 into assessments that has been matched by partners. Some examples include work the Playa Lakes JV (PLJV) did on assessing the value of CRP for grassland birds. PLJV will release a similar assessment for short grass prairie assessment also. Mississippi State University analyzed data for Bobwhite quail and CP 33. CEAP is working in New England on assessing early succession practices on scrub-shrub birds. The Intermountain West JV and American Bird Conservancy are assessing habitat carrying capacity for sage steppe species. There is a project using Doppler radar to determine how wintering waterfowl are using land in response to land use changes influenced by WRP. The Central Hardwoods JV and University of Tennessee are beginning to monitor early successional habitat.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is not a technical agency so they depend on NRCS and other partners for technical support. FSA would like to hear from partners on how they could implement CRP in ways that helps specific priority species or habitats. They also would like comments on how to incorporate bird impacts in the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). The Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) has a budget of over \$500,000 for October 1 to March 31, 2010. They are funds for collection, harvest and storage for biomass. A rule for this program is under development.

Outcomes: The Committee is encouraged by the emphasis on partnerships and sees the JVs and state fish and wildlife agencies as key partners.

Actions: The Private Lands Subcommittee will review Practice Standards in 2010. Any Committee members that would like to add someone to the Subcommittee to review these should let Deb know. The Monitoring Subcommittee will be sent the draft Monitoring and Evaluation Standard for review and comment.

**NABCI/JV Awards** – The Awards Team has not made a final decision on the awards and therefore will provide their recommendation to the Committee within the next 2 weeks. They will request Committee concurrence with their recommendations via Survey Monkey.