

US NABCI COMMITTEE RETREAT - 2-3 July 2001
National Conservation Training Center, Sheperdstown, West Virginia

SUMMARY OF DECISIONS -

- * The document entitled “Actions required for more effective bird conservation” originally written as part two of the NABCI Vision document will be revised and kept current over time.
- * In order to assist in generating funding options, a list of potential upland conservation projects will be compiled to illustrate needs and the magnitude of opportunity.
- * A new seat on the US NABCI Committee will be offered to a representative of the upland game bird conservation community.
- * The Committee re-affirmed its commitment to facilitate strengthening and development of nationwide coverage of effective bird conservation delivery mechanisms through the Joint Venture system.
- * The Committee responded positively to the Joint Venture Management Board chairs’ suggestions of close cooperation, and will meet with that group to discuss, among other issues, a JV seat on the US NABCI Committee.
- * The Committee supports the ongoing development of a Communications strategy, and looks forward to its completion in September and the completion of a Trinational Communications strategy in December.
- * Efforts of both the Monitoring and International Working Groups will be stepped up.
- * The Staff Committee will continue work on the NABCI Infrastructure Plan, for review in September and discussion in November.
- * There will hereafter be a third co-chair of the US NABCI Committee representing the NGO community; George Fenwick will be the initial occupant of that position.
- * The Committee endorsed characteristics and processes associated with trinational demonstration projects as recommended by the Trinational Committee.
- * The Committee endorsed further progress on an international agreement on bird conservation.
- * Future meetings of the Committee will follow this retreat model, with the next one scheduled for November. NABCI will not hold business meetings at the North American or International meetings, but instead will use that time to share information and solicit input.

In Attendance:

Committee Members - George Fenwick (representing the NGO Subcommittee), Marshall Jones (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Jim Kushlan (represented by Melanie Steinkamp on July 2, both for the Waterbird Conservation Plan), Bob McDowell (IAFWA), Val Mezainis (Federal Agency Subcommittee), Steve Miller (Shorebird Conservation Plan), Gary Myers (Partners in Flight), Rollie Sparrowe (Wildlife Management Institute), Alan Wentz (Ducks Unlimited), Scott Yaich (North American Waterfowl Management Plan)

National Coordinator - David Pashley

Facilitator - Dave Case

Additional Staff - Naomi Edelson (IAFWA), Bob Ford (USFWS), John Frampton (SCDNR), Tom Melius (USFWS), Max Peterson (IAFWA), Herb Raffaele (USFWS, for portions of July 3), Paul Schmidt (USFWS), David Smith (USFWS)

Absent Committee Member - George Vandel (representing the National Flyway Council)

INTRODUCTION -

This is a report from a day and a half retreat of the US Committee of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. Included are summaries of key discussion issues and decision points, not always in precise chronological sequence.

UPDATE ON NABCI ACTIVITIES -

A draft document briefly describing the status of NABCI-related partnerships in the US is intended as a starting point to which additions can be made over time (SEE attached Update). The IAFWA will be circulating a questionnaire to states requesting additional updates; it was later suggested that this questionnaire be expanded to include a short list (top 3?) of the most important projects that meet the NABCI vision by providing landscape planning/coordination and meets the vision of NABCI. It was suggested that Joint Ventures be sent this same request.

REVIEW OF THE NABCI VISION -

Language in the September 2000 Vision document indicates that NABCI success will be a reflection of the work of others, particularly the bird initiatives.

Two of the three purposes originally envisioned for the Committee are relatively uncontroversial - representing the US internationally and increasing resources (although the means by which the latter is to be done are still under development). The purpose about which there is the greatest lack of clarity is serving as a forum for interaction among initiatives. While the word “coordinate” does not appear in the Vision relative to this topic, there are those who feel that coordination is ongoing that is too active. On the other hand, others are discouraged by what they perceive to be an insufficient level of coordination.

The key theme of “delivering the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships” continues as the center of the NABCI vision.

It was noted that resident game birds should be added into future drafts of the Vision.

THE “RECOMMENDED ACTIONS” DOCUMENT -

There was originally a second part of the Vision document dated March 20, 2000 and entitled “Actions required for more effective bird conservation” that listed specific actions and suggestions as to their cost. It was recognized at that time that the Vision itself would stay relatively constant, whereas the recommended actions would change over time. Therefore, the two parts were separated, but the second part has not seen much attention or any update since.

The Committee agreed to bring the Recommended Actions document up to date, to amend it yearly thereafter, and to make both it and the Vision document more visible. This responsibility was assigned to David Pashley, staff of the IAFWA (Naomi Edelson and/or Len Ugarenko), WMI (Rollie Sparrowe and Jim Woehr), and Steve Miller. The Federal Agency Subcommittee can serve as a source of information for those involved in this revision.

There may be too little an emphasis placed on monitoring and research as recommended actions relative to delivery of projects on the ground; this imbalance should be remedied.

ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF THE NABCI COMMITTEE -

(SEE attached summary of minutes of previous meetings)

There is apparent universal acceptance of the Vision of NABCI as stated above, but there is anxiety over NABCI as an entity. Although the Committee has been consistent in its role, there are perceptions in some segments of the conservation community that this has not been the case. The Committee is aware of these concerns and resolves to communicate better with this larger community, reinforcing the consistently held theme that NABCI is a means and not an end.

ROLE AND FUNCTION OF NABCI COMMITTEE -

There is little disagreement within the US Committee over what NABCI needs to do; the uncertainty lies in the issue of how to accomplish these things. The NABCI Committee is a forum for definition of needs and development of consensus. Although members can put these agreements into action (and have done a good deal of this over the 20 months of the Committee's existence), the Committee itself does not have the mandate or resources to directly pursue them. Resources for bird conservation have increased significantly in recent years, and there is hope that this increase will continue; nevertheless, the perception among some is that NABCI itself has not been successful in delivering resources. This is despite the fact that the organizations represented on the Committee were partially responsible for these increases, acting autonomously but in coordination exactly as spelled out in the NABCI vision.

FUNDING FOR UPLAND PROJECTS -

One of the great challenges facing NABCI is development of an adequate source of funding for projects not associated with wetlands. Various combinations of NAWCA and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act were discussed, including a promising appropriations environment for the former and a questionable one for the latter. Clear recommendations did not emerge, other than encouraging the appropriations process and continuing to work closely with the NAWCA Council. It is our understanding that the Council is in the process of developing criteria to evaluate upland habitat projects should funding become available. The Committee proposes meeting with the Council to clarify needs and opportunities for coordination. The Funding Group will take all of the above into consideration in constructing an array of ambitious options for the future, including identification of potential funding sources for recommended actions. Because this upland conservation need focuses on habitat, upland game birds are implicitly included.

LIST OF PROPOSED PROJECTS -

Unlike the situation in wetlands, partners have not developed a backlog of unfunded high quality upland projects, and developing this in the light of low current probabilities of funding will be problematical. Although developing a complete list of conservation needs addressed in PIF and other plans is an overwhelming challenge, a long list of quality projects could be created to serve as an indication of the magnitude of the opportunity. Species involved, habitats, sites, and amounts of money required would be attributes of this list. This catalog could be a powerful tool in illustrating the scale of the need that exists. Several relevant points were brought up by members of the Committee:

- * little of this can be realized without an expanded conservation infrastructure capable of the information management and delivery responsibilities that will arise along with new resources;
- * the Committee must be cautious to avoid the perception that it is prioritizing among projects;
- * can we target some of the projects to potential funding sources?
- * as needs often involve development of information, this list should include the full range of conservation needs, not just moving dirt;

Development of this list is the responsibility of the Funding Group, and some sort of working draft should be available prior to the next US NABCI Committee meeting, with an interim work session possibly scheduled for the IAFWA in September. This draft may include a series of questions as to the specific desired nature of the list. The list should be linked to the Recommended Actions document during its development.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE NAWCA COUNCIL -

Three individuals are both Council members and US NABCI Committee members, and other NABCI members have long histories of work with the Council. Communication lines are in place and the Committee needs to identify specific actions for members to take to strengthen these ties. NAWCA is evolving, in part because people preparing proposals are learning to craft projects that appeal to the Council while expanding the envelope of Council focus. Increasing appropriations and the NABCI vision will assure that this relationship and evolution will remain positive.

RESIDENT GAME BIRDS AND NABCI -

The Committee will offer a membership seat to a representative of the Resident Game Bird community, to be identified by the Resident Game Bird Working Group of the IAFWA. David Pashley will draft a letter to John Frampton in this regard.

COORDINATION AMONG MAJOR BIRD INITIATIVES -

The Committee recognized that different issues apply at different geographic scales. Such issues as species assessment and expansion of Partners in Flight Regional Coordinator roles are national in scope, but most integration takes place at the JV, BCR, or state level. The Committee discussed the unquestioned value of nationwide GIS bird relevant coverage, recognizing the difficulty of achieving this at such a scale and the plethora of layers and pieces already in existence. A seamless North American GIS coverage for bird conservation would have numerous ancillary applications. GIS support is incorporated into the optimal funding levels for Joint Ventures that is being acted upon by Congress. Ducks Unlimited has helped develop detailed GIS tools for the Lower Mississippi Valley, Prairie Potholes, California Central Valley, and Alaska. The USGS National Biological Information bird node is envisioned to ultimately include some habitat layers. It is more important now to identify what GIS tools exist and learn how to apply them than to develop new tools. Various means of accomplishing this were discussed, including workshops to demonstrate the effectiveness of GIS tools. Local (JV, BCR, state) workshops may be more effective in this regard than regional or national ones. David Smith and David Pashley will develop a prospectus of alternatives, and staff at the IAFWA may assist with development of a compendium of existing GIS tools.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS -

The Committee agrees on the desirability of catalyzing wall-to-wall partnerships following the JV model, and further that this is the best level at which to undertake such actions as the GIS work described above. The Committee also recognizes the importance of multiple levels of delivery mechanisms. The JV/BCR model can be effective at coordination, every project takes place within a state, and, ultimately, agencies, ngos and other partners actually do the delivery of projects. Local partners will determine which levels work best and the Committee should work with these partners to strengthen or build these mechanisms. Local discussions can be facilitated by the Committee, particularly in areas where partnerships do not currently operate (which includes Alaska, Hawaii, and about 30% of the lower 48 states).

JOINT VENTURES AND BIRD CONSERVATION REGIONS -

There was a suggestion that what appeared to be a strong dichotomy between JVs and BCRs a year or so ago has been dissipating as a result of practical experience around the country. In general, a JV is a partnership unit while a BCR is a biological unit, but there is considerable overlap. Some of the larger JVs (such as the Atlantic Coast, Upper Mississippi/Great Lakes, and Intermountain West) treat BCRs as geographic subunits in each of which all of the activities associated with a JV can take place, including building of a biological foundation, strengthening partnerships, and putting together projects. In those cases, a BCR Coordinator serves as an assistant JV Coordinator with a limited geographic responsibility. It was explained to the Committee that in other situations, a BCR Coordinator can assist a JV Coordinator by bringing perspectives relevant to bird groups and habitats outside of the traditional JV realm of activity (this is what is unfolding in the Pacific Coast JV). And there are those situations in which a BCR is basically outside of the coverage or prime focus area of any JV. Here, such as in the Central Hardwoods, BCR functions could mimic all of those occurring within a JV. It was suggested that the Committee should focus of facilitating development of this last type of JV-like partnership, one where none currently exists, as a priority action item.

The Committee discussed to need for primary supervisory responsibility for BCR Coordinators to reside in the local partnership (JV Board, Steering Committee, etc.). This includes issues of hiring and work plans. This is already occurring in two of the BCRs in which Coordinators have been hired (Central Hardwoods and Shortgrass Prairie) and is underway in the other two (Northern Pacific Rainforest and Northern Rockies). BCR Coordinators hired by other organizations have a responsibility to their employer (such as American Bird Conservancy) regarding reporting on grants and other administrative issues.

JOINT VENTURES AND THE NABCI COMMITTEE -

A first meeting of Joint Venture Management Board chairs occurred in January and a second meeting planned for September 16 (Sunday afternoon) at the IAFWA in Wichita. This group suggested a joint meeting with the NABCI Committee, and is investigating requesting a seat on the NABCI Committee. As a first step, the Committee suggests that a NABCI delegation consisting of Marshall Jones, Bob McDowell, David Pashley, and Steve Miller attend the September JV meeting. This delegation could suggest a full meeting of the two groups, perhaps in January of 2002, and should discuss the possibility of a new seat representing Joint Ventures on the NABCI Committee. David Pashley will draft a letter to the JV chairs suggesting these

actions.

The Joint Ventures have by and large expressed resolve to deliver the NABCI vision within their boundaries. New arrangements are being made to encourage broader participation, such as expansion of technical committees. This may pull in broader expertise including the state wildlife diversity program managers.

FLYWAY COUNCILS AND THE NABCI COMMITTEE -

The NABCI Committee discussed the importance of a strong and productive relationship with the Flyway Councils. Many facets of this relationship involve improved communications. A new Flyway Council representative to the NABCI Committee will be appointed later in the summer when George Vandel (who was unable to attend this meeting) steps down.

COMMUNICATIONS -

(SEE attached handout)

The discussion on communications included a request for consistent messages and materials for use in upcoming workshops. The positive factors behind such successful workshops as the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative and the Lower St. Lawrence Plain are being written up in a memo, but other pieces are also needed. One suggestion is a CD describing the Lower Mississippi Valley approach and the Thunderstorm Maps of the Prairie Potholes.

The US Communications strategy will be completed in September, with a Trinational strategy to follow in December. Resources beyond those already in place will be required to put these strategies into action.

SUBCOMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUP STRUCTURE -

There are two existing Subcommittees (NGOs and Federal Agencies) and the Committee approved formation of a third for States. Both of the existing Subcommittees are interested in expansion, but in the case of the NGO group, only to include those organizations with a primary or substantial focus on bird conservation. There are working groups for Communications, Monitoring, and International and a Funding Group loosely affiliated with the NGO Subcommittee. The Subcommittees are standing entities, each of which addresses a broad range of topics, and each of which is represented on the US NABCI Committee. Working groups are topical, may be temporary, and are not so represented. The Committee particularly stressed its interest in progress in the Monitoring working group relative to the initiatives, the NBII bird node, and effective continent-wide bird monitoring objectives. David Pashley will contact chair Marshall Howe and ask for an update during the next US NABCI Committee meeting. It was also suggested that the International working group be revitalized, and Herb Raffaele agreed to call a meeting in the near future.

The Committee requested a list of membership in the existing Subcommittees and Working Groups; David Pashley will supply this in the near future.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE -

The attention of the Committee was directed toward the table on page 7 of the March 11, 2001, draft of the NABCI Infrastructure Needs document. The Staff Committee was requested to use this table as a starting point and bring clearer direction to the Committee in a draft due for

review in September and for action during the November meeting. The Staff Committee should provide more details on each of these positions, including current status, justification, costs, and where each position might be housed. Priorities among positions should be categorized as high and immediate, mid-term, and long-term. These infrastructural needs should ultimately be incorporated into the Recommended Actions document.

There is a particular and immediate need to find support to keep central functions of the Waterbird Plan staffed. Also, a proposal has been submitted by the IAFWA Migratory Bird Committee to the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program to renew the Partners in Flight Regional Coordinators with an expanded role to assist with the other bird conservation plans (e.g., shorebird and waterbird). There will also be Communications funding needs in the near future, as the current contract with D.J. Case and Associates runs out of funds in September of this year.

STAFF COMMITTEE -

The Staff Committee currently consists of Brad Andres, Jack Capp, Bob Ford, Jim Kushlan, Andrew Milliken, Seth Mott, Larry Niles, Pat Patterson, Terry Rich, Josh Sandt, Melanie Steinkamp, Len Ugarenko, Jim Woehr, and Scott Yaich, all working with David Pashley as National Coordinator. The Staff Committee was originally asked to work on the Infrastructure document (that request is reiterated here) as well as an Action Plan to help set direction for the US NABCI Committee.

REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE SESSION -

The Committee decided that in order to attain broader buy-in from the NGO community, to recognize NGO efforts on behalf of NABCI (notably fundraising), to promote an open NABCI culture for conducting business, and to better facilitate cooperation and coordination among the initiatives, the Committee would have a third co-chair representing the NGO community. George Fenwick has agreed to serve in this position on a temporary basis, and the three NGO Committee members will propose a system for transition by the time of the November meeting.

TRINATIONAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS -

The US NABCI Committee agrees that application of the following six characteristics to the demonstration project concept would be useful. Such projects should:

1. Focus on habitat conservation with priority habitats defined by suites of species;
2. Incorporate local community interest and involvement;
3. Incorporate a strong partnership component and strengthens coordination, communication, and networking;
4. Involve all three countries;
5. Build individual and institutional capacity;
6. Include a means of measuring success, accountability, and evaluation.

Additionally, a preamble or summary will encourage feasibility of projects and a request that partners think boldly.

In terms of implementation, the Committee designates the National Coordinator, the Demonstration Project Working Group, and its representatives to the Trinational Committee to

work with Canada and Mexico to cooperatively develop ideas and partners for an array of projects, including existing and new efforts. The US NABCI Committee will facilitate this process and will help showcase these projects.

Some points brought forward in the discussion include:

- * These are trinational NABCI demonstration projects, the characteristics and development of which are irrelevant to the issue of whether or not projects within any nation are undertaken within the NABCI vision.
- * There is no intention on the part of the US NABCI Committee to be involved in any process involving review or approval of these projects.
- * Calling these “Vision Projects” or “Showcase Projects” rather than “Demonstration Projects” may better serve the communications purposes involved and reduce implications of review and judgement. We want to set a high threshold in the characteristics without implying that there are not numerous valuable NABCI-related projects ongoing that do not quite fit in the category of helping to expand the trinational NABCI vision.
- * An array of demonstration projects will better demonstrate the breadth of the trinational NABCI vision than one or a few projects.

INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT -

The Trinational drafting team for this agreement will meet in Mexico on August 13-14. Themes that have been discussed domestically include:

- * it should encompass the ranges of North American birds;
- * it should be written in a manner to facilitate signing by nations beyond the three initially involved;
- * the initial signatories should be the US, Canada, and Mexico, with a possibility of signatures by others if this is feasible;
- * an opportunity should exist for endorsement by non-federal partners, perhaps in a complementary document;
- * it will not include funding or mandatory requirements;
- * it will not be redundant of existing agreements, going beyond what is now in place.

The issue as to whether structure should be referenced in the agreement was discussed without firm resolution.

The Committee endorses moving forward on this agreement as presented.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL ISSUES -

The US NABCI Committee does not want to be a barrier to advances made by its representatives to the Trinational Committee or the Trinational Committee as a whole. In general, the opportunities and responsibilities of US NABCI to assist in funding bird conservation activities in Mexico and beyond have not received much attention of late. The Council for the Commission for Environmental Cooperation met recently, and confirmed development of an international Biodiversity Working Group to provide the CEC with guidance on those issues. The likelihood of continued CEC funding for NABCI is promising.

NEXT MEETING -

The next full meeting of the US NABCI Committee will take place on November 14-15

(beginning at 1 PM on the first day), again at the National Conservation Training Center. Again, attendance will be limited to Committee members and invited staff. The Committee agreed that a retreat atmosphere is conducive to productive discussions. There will be an information sharing meeting at the IAFWA in Wichita in September, covering 2 hours on either the Thursday or Friday (David Pashley will work with Max Peterson and the co-chairs on exact timing).

Report prepared by David Pashley with assistance by Dave Case