

**US NABCI COMMITTEE MEETING
SUMMARY**

**Washington, D.C.
January 28-29, 2003**

Committee members present - Richard Bishop, George Fenwick, John Frampton, Rebecca Frank, Catherine Hickey (for Steve Miller), Jim Kushlan, Bruce McCloskey (for Partners in Flight), Val Mezainis, Gary Myers (for the IAFWA President), Josh Sandt, Rollie Sparrowe, Steve Williams, Scott Yaich

Staff present - Brad Andres, Paul Baicich, Roxanne Bogart, Jack Capp, Jim Cole, Bob Ford, Rick Kearney, David Pashley, Pat Patterson, Herb Raffaele, Terry Rich, Melanie Steinkamp, Jennifer Wheeler, Jim Woehr

Also in attendance - Jimmy Bullock, Diane Granfors, Sean McMahon, Paul Schmidt, David Smith

US NABCI Committee Structure (Part I) -

Gary Myers (Acting State Co-Chair) explained that having three co-chairs for the US NABCI Committee is awkward and inefficient for communications and general operations, and suggested that a single individual be designated as chair, with the chair to rotate annually, if so desired by Committee, among the federal, state, and NGOs. The Federal, State, and NGO representatives will constitute an Executive Committee, to convene when needed. Following a brief discussion, the committee approved this structure. Steve Williams (USFWS) became the first individual selected under this new procedure.

Bird Funding Workshop -

Jim Woehr (WMI) provided a brief overview of the recent workshop. The results still need to be tabulated, yet Jim observed that two common themes and four needs emerged in several working groups. Theme #1, enhanced delivery of habitat-based conservation, resonated among all of the bird initiatives as a priority action.

Theme #2, improved science and information for conservation decision-making, was also a common priority. Specific program needs mentioned included greater authorizations and appropriations for regional joint venture partnerships, North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants, State Wildlife Grants, and Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grants with less restrictive conditions in the latter program. Jim committed to tabulating workshop results promptly and distributing a list of funding priorities to participants by Friday, February 14 for

their review. His goal is to have the review done and a final version available for the PIF Strategic Planning Session on March 24-25.

Rollie Sparrowe (WMI) provided the committee with a brief history of the funding group and recognized Jim, Pat Patterson (TNC), and David Pashley (ABC) for their leadership of this team. Rollie emphasized that the funding group is not the only body responsible for future lobbying efforts; all NGOs and states will need to be involved. The funding group, with augmentation from Bob Ford (USFWS) and Rick Kearney (IAFWA), will summarize the ideas created at the workshop and develop a set of near term and long term lobbying strategies at the national, state, and local levels. Committee members agreed that more inclusiveness was necessary to give all parties, including those not present at the workshop, a stake in the lobbying effort.

Gary Myers echoed that sentiment and suggested that a representative from each bird initiative take part in the planning effort to provide "ownership" for the final product. He asked the group to script a message that would go out to state wildlife agency directors for them to use in rallying bird interests in support. He stressed the need to have NABCI Committee members explain the results of the workshop to their constituencies and to demonstrate partnership in the process.

US NABCI Committee Structure (Part II) -

David Pashley announced his replacement of George Fenwick (ABC) as ABC's representative to the committee. George was also the US NABCI NGO co-chair and Rollie Sparrowe has agreed to replace George in that capacity.

Rick Kearney gave an overview of staff discussions regarding possible replacements for David Pashley as the US NABCI Coordinator. Following a brief discussion, the committee agreed to the staff recommendation, namely, to ask the USFWS to provide Bob Ford to serve in that capacity. Steve Williams agreed to the request. Rick Kearney and Jim Woehr will serve in more visible and responsible roles as Bob's two assistant coordinators.

The Committee heartily thanked David Pashley for his hard work and leadership as the US NABCI Coordinator since 1999.

Strategic Review of USFWS Bird Programs -

Steve Williams opened a discussion of recent efforts to begin development of a strategic plan for the USFWS Migratory Bird program. Paul Schmidt (USFWS) explained that the service will seek input from bird conservation stakeholders in creating this plan and asked the US NABCI committee to assist in the scoping process and to help develop a vision for the Migratory Bird

Program in the Service.

Research as a US NABCI Action Item -

In the absence of Ken Williams (USGS), David Pashley proposed including management-oriented research as a component of the US NABCI Action Plan. After a brief discussion, Scott Yaich (DU) suggested that revising an existing action item to include research might be more appropriate. Bob Ford pointed out that monitoring, research, and assessment all contribute to knowledge about the resource. Expanding the scope of the current "monitoring" action item would be an acceptable way to capture the intent. Jim Kushlan (USGS, Waterbird Conservation for the Americas) asked the US NABCI Committee to explore ways of communicating science needs to the bird research community. Terry Rich (FWS, PIF) concurred as long as funding sources were identified, as did Brad Andres (USFWS, Shorebird Conservation Plan) who also suggested approaching graduate schools to encourage research into practical management questions. Rollie Sparrowe pointed out that recent changes in USGS budgets prevents them from satisfying many bird conservation information needs and that an organic research organization was needed in the USFWS. Steve Williams assured all that Service programs will have a firm science foundation and suggested that Cooperative Research Units may be another source of research support.

PIF Continental Plan -

Terry Rich provided an overview of recent events in PIF, to include plans for a strategic planning session being held in conjunction with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in March. The PIF Continental Plan is still being developed; with continued emphasis, it will be ready by September.

Waterbird Conservation for the Americas -

Jim Kushlan, on behalf of Waterbird Conservation for the Americas, officially submitted the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan to the Committee. Copies were distributed.

Jim reported on plans for creation of the Waterbird Conservation Council. These are well along, and a Council is expected to have its first meeting this Spring.

Jennifer Wheeler, Waterbird Conservation Coordinator, described progress in regional planning. Regional Working Groups are moving ahead at different speeds and by different approaches. Progress has been especially strong in the Intermountain West and Caribbean, which held a workshop at the North American Ornithological Convention. Regional coordinators met at the Waterbird Society meeting. The Monitoring Committee will meet at the Pacific Seabird Group meeting.

US Shorebird Conservation Plan -

Catherine Hickey (PRBO Conservation Science) discussed shorebird planning activities. USSCP is forming a shorebird science information network that will operate on a flyway scale. A shorebird management listserv is in place that allows biologists to share information and ask questions of subject matter experts. Partners in Mexico are developing a shorebird conservation plan. Conservation projects will focus on important shorebird sites identified in the plan.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan -

Work on the 2003 Update continues with comments on the first draft being evaluated in the next few months. A second review draft will be available during the summer and final version is due for completion in the fall. Despite the fact that NAWMP partners have impacted approximately 15.3 million acres of habitat in the US and Canada, much more remains to be done.

Upland Game Bird Working Group - John Frampton (South Carolina DNR) described progress in the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative with the hiring of Breck Carmichael using administrative grants and contributions by state fish and wildlife agencies in the Southeast. This initiative will be growing to become a national program in support of bobwhite.

Canada report - Trevor Swerdfager, Canadian Wildlife Service, provided a brief overview of the Canadian NABCI Council operations and action items. He welcomed the opportunity for national committees to interact more frequently.

Trinational MOU - Herb Raffaele reported that the trinational MOU text had been approved by each country's writing team members and national committees, and that the MOU had cleared Agency level approval in each country. For the United States, the MOU is now going through proper channels between the Department of Interior and the White House, and the Department is waiting on further guidance from the White House. Herb and Roxanne Bogart will determine current status, and provide input to the Department of interior that a signing at the North American Conference in March 2003 is the preferred venue. However, timing is an increasingly important consideration; staff will continue to push for resolution of a signing venue.

Hemispheric Strategy for Migratory Species - Herb Raffaele reported that an important hemispheric conference, supported by the US State Department, will be held late summer or fall of 2003 to build support and improve coordination for conservation of migratory species, including birds. The staff and the US-NABCI

International Working Group, proposed the following text from the US NABCI Committee to the conference:

"The NABCI U.S. Committee supports the development of a hemispheric strategy for migratory species, strongly encourages NABCI partners to fully engage in this process, offers the NABCI U.S. Committee as the U.S. body to engage in such discussions based on the Trinational MOU and NABCI conservation delivery mechanisms, and instructs its representatives to communicate this position to the Trinational NABCI Committee and seek concurrence of Canada and Mexico."

The US NABCI Committee supported this text, and encouraged strong participation at this meeting from US NABCI Committee members and staff. The text will be discussed at the upcoming NABCI Trinational meeting to gauge Canadian and Mexican support for such language. The Trinational NABCI Committee discussion will be reported at the next US meeting, as well as more information about meeting dates and location.

Trinational NABCI projects -

Mexico has identified six initial areas for trinational cooperation, built around priority AICAs (IBAs). The six areas for initial attention for bird conservation in Mexico are:

1. Northeastern Yucatán peninsula (Ria Lagartos in Yucatán, Cozumel, and Sian Ka'an in Quintana Roo);
2. El Triunfo (Chiapas);
3. Chihuahuan Desert grasslands (including Janos-Nuevo Casas Grandes in Chihuahua);
4. Marismas Nacionales (Nayarit-Sinaloa);
5. Chamela - Cuixmala (Jalisco); and
6. El Cielo (Tamaulipas).

A series of regional workshops in Mexico this fall and winter have focused on these priority areas. These workshops are designed to help build regional alliances in Mexico and to promote the development of Trinational Projects. In late September 2002, CEC funds were available to support some 'pilot' Trinational Projects, but those proposals needed to be developed and approved within the next 4-6 weeks. The three National NABCI Coordinators worked quickly with NABCI partners in all three countries to meet the deadline.

Three 'pilot' Trilateral Projects have now been approved by the CEC for funding. The projects have received ~\$150,000 with about 50% of the funds going to Mexico and 25% each to Canada and the United States. All of the projects focus on a shared continental conservation concern and shared species but have the component in each country led by a local group. All projects are well linked to ongoing conservation work, including to projects funded by the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, so that there will be maximum leverage of the CEC funds. A final report on all three projects will be available by June 2003.

CEC Biodiversity Working Group update

The CEC Biodiversity Working Group is developing goals and strategies for CEC Fiscal Years 2004 -2005. Draft language for NABCI is as follows:

The envisioned priority areas are: 1) strengthening NABCI structure, 2) continue support to NABCI demonstration projects and establish programmatic links to ongoing CEC programs; and 3) help consolidate a North American bird monitoring and reporting system that has the potential to contribute to the CEC's SOE process. In 2004, the CEC will assess the evolution of NABCI as a self-sustaining initiative and will benefit from the guidance provided by the Biodiversity Conservation Working Group.

Species Assessment Working Group

The Species Assessment Working Group (SAWG) presented its Terms of Reference to the US NABCI Committee for discussion and approval (electronic copies available from David Pashley (dpashley@abcbirds.org)). After a brief discussion and clarification of points, the Committee had no comments regarding the concept as proposed by the Working Group. Several concerns were raised, however, regarding protocol and structure of the working group, i.e. who is appointed to this group and to whom do they report?

Jim Kushlan noted that the Waterbird Conservation of the Americas has discussed this, and supports the further development of species conservation assessment. It has no strong opinion on how to organize this. It feels the approaches taken by the Initiatives now are not very different, and that what now exists is being used well at the regional level. So developing full consistency may be valuable but not essential. It wishes that the focus be on enhancing the value of such analyses in delivering conservation value on the ground rather than academic debate.

The Committee agreed that: 1) the SAWG should be part of the broader Action Item (as proposed at this meeting) for "Science"; which includes research and monitoring, 2) SAWG Committee members are appointed by the US NABCI Committee, 3) the SAWG is answerable first to the US NABCI staff, and 4) responsibilities and actions are delegated as needed by the US Trinational Committee.

Rotation of representatives to the Trinational NABCI Committee -

Herb Raffalele presented a resolution that Trinational members should rotate every three years. After vigorous discussion, the Committee voted to adopt a rotation process as follows:

- 1) Trinational Committee members can serve consecutive 3 year terms,
- 2) Subcommittees representing NGOs, States, and Federal Agencies should make nominations for Trinational Committee representation to the US NABCI Committee, although final committee representation is the decision of the US NABCI Committee, and
- 3) Efforts should be made to assure that committee member changes are staggered to ensure committee stability.

IAFWA task force on Joint Ventures -

This Task Force, consisting of the chairs of the Working Groups of the IAFWA Bird Conservation Committee and a few selected others, met on 25 Jan. 2003. Their assigned task is to review the evolution and current status of Joint Ventures in the United States and propose alternatives to the Bird Conservation Committee for building upon success to best facilitate advancement of integrated bird conservation. The Task Force recognizes ongoing success and the power, ultimate decision-making authority, and autonomy of local partnerships. It is going to produce an Interim Report based on these principles, a wish for "wall-to-wall" effective Joint Ventures, and the value of Bird Conservation Regions. In discussions, the group stressed the importance of balance between the need for adequate staffing and capacity and the desirability of maximizing the investment of resources on the ground.

Review of Joint Venture Implementation Plans -

Historically, JV Implementation Plans were reviewed by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Committee. That Committee will continue to review plans for their effectiveness in linking with continental waterfowl objectives, but there is no mechanism in place for a review on the impacts of Plans on other bird groups. This is important in that Implementation Plans now will go to the FWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation to assure that they meet the standards set in the recent Director's Order on Joint Ventures. FWS is therefore requesting assistance from

the other bird initiatives to assure that future JV Plans fulfill their continental objectives.

The US Shorebird Council has decided to approach this issue on two scales. First, regional shorebird groups will work closely with Joint Ventures in developing plans to assure that they meet local shorebird objectives. Second, a national subcommittee has been established to provide guidance for these regional efforts and to review plans from a continental scale. This process will be written up in the near future and provided to the other initiatives as they consider how to deal with this issue. It was noted that population objectives for most bird groups at a regional scale are currently very imprecise, and that it will be a challenge for any JV to hit a poorly defined target.

A few years ago, Joint Ventures estimated that they could meet their needs with an annual budget of \$10.4 million, and Congress is moving toward appropriations at that level by 2004. This number, however, was established before it was decided that we need wall-to-wall Joint Ventures and before Joint Ventures were fully committed to delivering conservation for all birds in all habitats. At the recent WMI funding workshop, an estimate surfaced that the real need is closer to \$20 million annually. The Division of Bird Habitat Conservation will work with Joint Ventures to develop a more accurate estimate of needs in upcoming months.

Cerulean Warbler workshop -

A second Cerulean Warbler workshop was held in December, 2002. Concern over this species is based on its persistent and widespread population decline, the potential effects of land management practices on its population, and its consideration for listing under the Endangered Species Act. It breeds in mature forests of eastern North America and winters on the midslopes of the Andes of northwestern South America. Causes for apparent declines are essentially unknown. The Cerulean Warbler Conservation Initiative includes government agencies, NGOs, academia, and the forest products industry. The Initiative does not take a stand on the listing issue, but rather is seeking means of increasing Cerulean Warbler populations to the extent that conservation concern for the species can be reduced. The Initiative brings stakeholders to the table, including the private landowners who manage the vast majority of habitat for the bird. It is concerned with system-wide conservation issues of which this species is a flagship rather than single-species management, and it is a logical progression to a potentially promising State Conservation Agreement for this bird. Balance, integrity, and partnership are the philosophical themes that tie the Initiative together.

Monitoring working group

A draft "Monitoring Objectives and Standards for Bird Conservation in North America" was distributed for review by the various bird initiatives by February 28. The two primary objectives outlined in the document are to inform management decisions that are based upon resource status and to help identify causes of population change in order to provide an improved basis for future management decision-making. Committee members commented that monitoring is hugely important, but very difficult to sell; terms like assessment or evaluation may be more popular.

Communications

A NABCI Staff retreat has been scheduled for May 21-23 at the National Conservation Training Center. The objective is to suggest NABCI direction for each issue on the Action Plan. Committee members are encouraged to attend, and a few additional key contributors will be invited. An International Communications Strategy is close to completion, and will be distributed in the near future. The international NABCI web site is up and running (www.nabci.org). The second edition of the All-Bird Bulletin is due in February. Please submit articles to Rick Kearney by February 14.

The Committee requested that Bob Ford prepare a fact sheet for distribution at the North American meeting in March 2003.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the US NABCI Committee will take place in Washington, DC, on or about August 11, 2003. The amount of material on the agenda will determine whether it will be a single day or day-and-a-half meeting.

Minutes submitted by: David Pashley, Rick Kearney, Bob Ford
(comments to Robert_P_Ford@fws.gov)