

U.S. NABCI Committee Meeting Tasks and Summary August 17-18, 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), Dan Ashe and Paul Schmidt, (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Laurie Osterndorf (for Matt Frank, Partners in Flight), Carol Lively (U.S. Forest Service), Steve Hilburger (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), Dave Scott (Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Working Group), Arthur Feinstein (Association of Joint Venture Management Boards)

Other participants: Deb Hahn (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies); Guy Foulks, Alicia King, Ken Kriese, Elena Babij, Marcia Pradines (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); Antoinette Condo (State Department); Keith Pardieck (U.S. Geological Survey); Anne Law (American Bird Conservancy); Gabe Horner (The Nature Conservancy); Jen Mock Schaeffer and Dean Smith (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies); Bridgette Collins (Bobwhite Quail IPA with Farm Service Agency); Caroline Garrett (Ducks Unlimited); Charlie Rewa (Natural Resources Conservation Service); Kelly Novak (Farm Services Agency)

Purpose of August 2010 meeting:

- **discuss progress on 2010 objectives,**
- **decide on recommendations to advance 2010 tasks,**
- **determine resources needed to complete 2010 tasks, and**
- **plan dates for winter 2011 meeting.**

Next U.S. NABCI Committee Meeting

January 19-20, 2011 – Deb will confirm that this date works for the majority of the Committee

Website - Over the past year or two the Committee has discussed updating the website to give it a new look and have it better reflect the Committee. Roxanne Bogart, USFWS and Deb Reynolds, ACJV volunteered to update the look and content of the NABCI website. The website was presented at the meeting for Committee members comment and approval. The Committee unanimously supported the website with a few minor comments and thanked R. Bogart and D. Reynolds for their work.

Chair's Agenda/Priorities for the next 6 months - John's Hoskins retired 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 time to NABCI priorities.

Discussion: The Committee appreciated the time J. Hoskins, ABC, DU, and TNC took with appropriations and OMB staff to support Committee priorities. The Committee agrees that 1) funding for NABCI priorities, 2) support for the 4 legislative and policy issues, and 3) continued communication with federal agencies on bird conservation and the 2012 budgets are the priorities for the next 6 months. Committee members would like to send a letter to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Conservation Commission. Deb will circulate address and names for Missouri Conservation Commission. Paul will draft a letter from USFWS that others can use as a template.

Upcoming Chair Change in January – For the last 4 or 5 years the Committee chair has rotated between the AFWA representative and USFWS. It is time for the chair to return to USFWS in January 2011. USFWS will hopefully have a new Director at that time and USFWS will support that chairmanship. J. Hoskins and D. Hahn will work with P. Schmidt and Dan Ashe to transfer chair responsibilities to USFWS starting in January 2011. The Committee recommended that in a couple of years they consider whether other federal agencies might want to chair.

Outcome: The Committee approved the priorities for the Chair and agreed that the chair will move to USFWS starting in January 2011.

Action(s): A timeline will be developed for the next 6 months so that the necessary meetings can be conducted. Federal Agencies that would like the Chair to meet with their agency should let him know and also provide information on what the objectives and needs are.

State of the Birds Report – The 2010 State of the Birds Report was released on March 11 by Secretary Salazar and other partners including J. Hoskins. The report has received much press. There were briefings conducted on the Hill and presentations have been made to a variety of partners including the Council of Environmental Quality, Canadian and Mexican partners and State Fish and Wildlife Agency Directors. The release generated thousands of media hits. There have been hundreds of thousands of website hits. Secretary Salazar and Al Gore continue to cite the report. **Please be sure that there is a link to the State of the Birds website on your organizations and agencies websites (www.stateofthebirds.org).**

The theme of the 2011 Report is to analyze and assess the state of birds on public lands (state and federal lands). The Subcommittee would like the Committee to consider a companion report in 2012 to analyze the state of birds on private lands. The report will highlight the importance of public lands to birds and will also discuss responsibilities. The next meeting of the Subcommittee will be at the end of September. The data used for public lands ownership will likely not include acquisitions made in the last year or 2. The Committee asked the Subcommittee to consider including federally owned easements (E.g. NRCS and USFWS). NRCS will provide maps for their consideration. Although policy makers in DC are a key audience for this report another priority audience should be state

level leadership. The Committee recommended that the Subcommittee remember the issue of climate change when discussing the future of public lands for bird conservation. In order to facilitate a discussion of the interface between public and private lands, the Committee endorsed the 2012 report topic of private lands.

Report budget – Team members and their organizations are committing significant resource of time and expertise but there are significant other expenses involved in report development, production and dissemination.

Communications Team and Legislative Team – Over the next month the Communications Team and the Legislative Team will be developed. Committee members should nominate staff to participate in both teams. The teams are critical to maximize the conservation benefits from the report. A document will be circulated to Committee members for comment. It relates to how to use the report. We want to make sure we consider how to use the report at the policy maker level but also to empower people working on the ground at Refuges, Parks, etc to impact support for their lands. We will also distribute a short summary of the primary messages and interim summaries of progress as the report is developed. The Committee recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture be invited to the March 2011 report roll out in addition to Secretary Salazar.

Outcome(s): The Committee supports the public lands report and endorses the topic of private lands for the 2012 report.

Action(s): NRCS would like to be part of the 2012 team. The Committee will send Deb nominations for members of both the Communications and Legislative Teams. The Subcommittee will consider the Committee comments on report development.

NABCI Coordination Funding - 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 at which time the Committee agreed to a 70% federal 30% NGO/State commitment to coordination funding. BLM is in the process of committing funding support for the next 5 years. Missouri Department of Conservation and USFWS reaffirmed their funding commitment for 2011. The USFWS has 2 years left in their commitment and USGS has 3 years left. Therefore, funding is nearly secured for 2011. State agencies will continue to work to determine how to bring more money to the table. The Committee will explore the possibility of using SWG competitive grant funding in the future.

Outcome: The Committee has secured 90% of the funding for 2011 and continues to explore ways to fund coordination beyond that.

Actions: Federal and state agencies will finalize contracts for 2011. Paul Schmidt will lead an effort to consider whether SWG competitive grant funding is a possible source for 2012 and beyond.

Policy and Legislative Subcommittee – The Subcommittee was asked to update the Committee on priority policy and legislative issues. The Committee will discuss each issue and consider what if any action should be taken.

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) (Paul Schmidt and Dan Ashe) – 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 they believe there needs to be a continental approach. In 2010, the USFWS and USGS funded nine LCCs. There are permanent coordinators in seven LCCs and the other LCCs have interim coordinators. Some LCCs are implementing projects and others are getting up and running. More details about the status of the LCCs can be found in the presentation on the NABC website.

The questions raised were related to the most effective way to partners with the LCCs, the LCC/JV relationship, the connections with Canada and Mexico, the issues state agencies will have with requests to participate on more boards, and the status of funding into the future. There were no actions related to LCCs at this time.

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. 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. At this point legislative action is unlikely. The crux of the issue is that it is a regulation issue and some members would prefer to limit federal regulation. In lieu of legislation the other alternative is rule making. Rule making could restore up 90% of the protection lost. The current direction is to first deliver guidance and then embark on rule making. Science is going to be critical to build the case for restoration and protection and NABCI partners will be critical to providing the science to support rule making. The NABCI Committee is ready when needed to provide support on this issue.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (Gabe Horner, 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. In spite of the program's successes, it has only been fully funded twice during the program's 40-year history. Since the Gulf Oil Spill the House and Senate are considering bills to address clean up and future spills. H.R. 3534, the Consolidated Land, Energy, and Aquatic Resources Act of 2010 -- the CLEAR Act -- passed the House on July 30. The act fully funds the LWCF. There is a chance the Senate will also take up a similar bill but it is likely that LWCF will be included. There are two bills that have been introduced in the Senate—one that includes full funding for LWCF and one that does not. Now is the time to call Senators to support LWCF funding. For more information go to www.lwcfcoalition.org.

America's Great Outdoors (AGO) is a complimentary initiative that the President announced in April. There have been listening sessions around the country. The last one is in September and the report to the President is due in November. The DOI website is accepting

comments. It will be important to comment by the end of the month. AGO is a landscape level initiative to make an impact on the landscape in the long term. Based on post meeting discussions with leadership at NPS and the Chief of the Forest Service the Committee will submit comments by the end of the month.

Farm Bill Reauthorization (Jen Mock Schaeffer, AFWA) – The last Farm Bill passed in May 2008. It expires in 2012. The House has already started reauthorization hearings. The Senate has begun talking to Secretary Vilsack. They are beginning now because they are worried that budgets will get tighter the longer they wait and to avoid the Presidential election in 2012. Congressman and House Committee on Agriculture Chairman Collin Peterson is aiming to have a bill to the President at end 2011. The Senate is not on the same track. The conservation community including AFWA and the TRCP Working Group on Agriculture has started working. AFWA hopes to adopt a policy in March 2011. There will be opportunity to provide input and engage through the NABCI Committee and their Private Lands Subcommittee. Some critical issues include changes to WHIP (E.g., state lands are no longer eligible and there is a cap on funding levels), maintaining funding provisions such as WRP and GRP and improving the functioning of some of the programs. They will be reaching out to this Committee and the bird committee for information and support. The Committee had a discussion about the limitations imposed by 1619 and whether we might be able to change that in the next Farm Bill also. The Committee will work through their Private Lands Subcommittee to comment and weigh in on Farm Bill policies as they impact birds and their habitats.

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 especially because it is an election year. The Coalition requests are below. On July 22 the House Appropriations marked up a bill. The overall Bill is below the President's budget. The Senate has yet to mark up a bill. (Funding requests - 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).) Beyond 2011 funding, we need to start weighing in on agency priorities for 2012 and will discuss potential meetings for the fall of 2010.

The Reauthorization of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Neotrop Act) is still in play. They hope the Senate will include a number of wildlife bills (JV authorization, Neotrop Act, etc.) in an omnibus package attached to a public lands package. There may be opportunities for the NABCI chair to discuss this in meetings in the fall. A summary of key messages is available on the NABCI webpage.

International - Greg Butcher presented on a number of different international programs and partnerships to highlight the extent and breadth of the international efforts across the continent and hemisphere. NABCI partners have a shared vision of the importance of working internationally that has been growing stronger for the last 10 years. There is an immense amount of international conservation work going in North America and throughout the Western Hemisphere—tri-national grasslands conservation; the Western Hummingbird Partnership; Wood Thrush and Bicknell's Thrush working groups; Red Knot and other shorebird conservation efforts; Appalachian Mountains, Pacific Coast, Sonoran and Rio Grande Joint Venture have taken the initiative to work internationally; and regional alliances in Mexico are forming in some cases with the help of NAWCA and Neotrop Act grants. Because of the economic climate of the last 5 or 6 years, the NABCI US Committee changed its focus from raising funds for tri-national work to trying to increase budgets for programs/organizations that have international work as a priority.

The Committee recognizes the importance and benefits (particularly strategic to US investment in habitat protection, restoration and enhancement, by working in partnership to ensure conservation for birds throughout their range) to international conservation efforts and should support programs that work to this end (E.g., USFS International Programs, DU, TNC, Audubon, Southern Wings, Neotrop Act, etc.). The Committee should also look for additional opportunities to encourage Joint Ventures to consider developing and working with international partners and to support initiatives such as the Western Hemisphere Reserve Network (WHSRN), the Copper River International Migratory Bird Initiative (CRIMBI), and cerulean warbler/wood thrush/Bicknell's thrush conservation efforts to name a few.

Outcome: The Committee recognizes the important work going on now but would like the Tri-national members to consider a potential meeting to reconnect with NABCI in Mexico and Canada. One idea would be to have a meeting at the Tri-lateral in Mexico in 2011.

Monitoring – Based on the 2009 database products developed by the Subcommittee (*Data Management Best Practices and Standards for Biodiversity Data Applicable to Bird Monitoring and Meeting the Challenges for Data Management for Bird Conservation*), a proposal was submitted to the LCCs for consideration in the funds available nationally for LCC implementation. Paul Schmidt reported it was not chosen for funding. Deb Hahn talked with Gabriel (Gabby) Calzada about integrating LCC development with the Monitoring Subcommittee and will follow up on those discussions.

The next steps being discussed now are 1) to support and promote the development of a national grid (see handout) and 2) to work with partners to conduct a national monitoring workshop. The Subcommittee is very supportive of item 1 and is considering item 2. They would like to see the objectives and know better how a national workshop will advance the goals of the 2007 monitoring report. The Committee recommends that we continue to consider the LCCs and their potential significant roll in monitoring. There are also a number of regional monitoring efforts that need support also. The Subcommittee is struggling to find its niche at the moment. Brad Andres, current chair, is stepping down. The Committee will determine the new lead for the Subcommittee.

Outcomes: The Committee supported the Subcommittee general direction. Paul Schmidt, Steve Hilburger, David Pashley, and Jim Kushlan will find a new chair for the Subcommittee.

BCR Map Updates - The review team received 4 requests for changes from the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas and the Gulf Coast Joint Venture and the Upper Mississippi River/Great Lakes Joint Venture. The handout outlines the final recommendations for each request. The most challenging request was the request to include marine BCRs because that is a tri-national discussion. Jennifer Wheeler, Humberto Berlanga, Garry Donaldson, and Andrew Courtier are working on integrating the different marine BCR/ecoregional systems in the 3 countries.

Outcome: The Committee endorsed the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas marine BCRs within the boundaries of the US recognizing that Canada and Mexico use different systems. They would like a final map from the tri-national team working on this by December 31, 2010.

NABCI/AJVMB Awards – Revised award guidelines were presented (see handout). Additionally 11 points/recommendations were submitted for approval.

1. Current NABCI Committee members are not eligible for the awards
2. The Awards Subcommittee will address nominations of AJVMB members on a case by case basis since AJVMB does not have a structured membership.
3. Ideally, nominations should come from outside an individual's organization.
4. Letters of support are welcome but one should be from outside the individual's organization.
5. The nomination guidelines need to be updated to be clearer about what the nominations should include, who reviews the nominations, and where they will be presented.
6. Nominations will be requested in late August/early September and must be received by December 31, 2010 by 5:00pm ET.
7. Nominations can be received from the bird conservation community, the NABCI Committee and the Awards Subcommittee.
8. The Awards Subcommittee will discuss potential nominations in October/November via email/conference call.
9. The Awards Subcommittee will meet face to face either the night before the winter NABCI meeting or at some point during the first day of the winter NABCI meeting.
10. Recommended nominations will be presented to the US NABCI Committee for approval on the second day of their winter meeting.
11. The Awards Subcommittee may recommend 1 or more awards in a given year.

Private lands – Terrell Erickson provided the following Farm Bill updates.

Farm Bill conservation program implementation - Final rules are at OMB for clearance. They have tried to increase flexibility to achieve program objectives. Rules will be finalized in the next month or two.

Financial assistance programs – They have completed contracts (aka obligated funds) for \$1,032,655.00.

Easement programs – 1465 people enrolled in WRP with approximately 241,000 acres. For the Grassland Reserve Program they have enrolled approximately 231,000 acres.

Conservation Innovation grants – They awarded almost \$18 million that included about \$17 Million in match.

Sage Grouse Initiative – It includes \$21 million of EQIP and WHIP and almost \$6 million from GRP. They hired a science advisor to help with monitoring and science issues. They have increased capacity with the help from partners and initiated some monitoring through CEAP (more below).

Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative – They provided \$20 million and received so much demand that they added money to the initiative.

Biological capacity – The Private Lands Subcommittee continues to work on this issue. They met with the chief, assistant chief and their staff in April. However, since that time activities have been side tracked by the Gulf Oil Spill. Using the information developed by the Subcommittee, Wendell Gilgert, NRCS, worked with Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) to provide matching funds for approximately 30 positions in western states. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has also joined the discussion on biological capacity and is working on an agreement with NRCS and other federal partners to get money to increase biological capacity. The Committee is very appreciate of the work done by PRBO and feels that to continue to see results we need to update the partner biologists/NRCS biologist map.

Conservations Reserve Program (see CRP/VPA presentation for more information) – Skip Hyberg presented on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The 39th general sign up was August 2-27. The Secretary has announced his intention to bring the Conservation Reserve Program up to the 32 million acre maximum enrollment. The program has increased from 1.6 million acres in 2001 to 4.6 million acres today. It includes multiple wildlife based initiatives such as State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement, Upland Bird Habitat Buffers, Longleaf Pine Plantings, Bottomland Hardwood, and Duck Nesting Habitat. There are still significant concerns about expiring acres.

Voluntary Public Access Program (see CRP/VPA presentation for more information) – Kelly Novak presented on the Voluntary Public Access Program (VPA). The intent of the program is to encourage owners and operators of private lands to voluntarily provide access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation. An interim rule was published on July 8 and comments are due September 7, 2010. FSA also published a Request for Applications on July 8. Grant applications were being accepted until 5 pm, August 23, 2010.

Lesser Prairie-chicken (see prairie-chicken presentation for more information) – Dave Mehlman presented on the status and needs of the Lesser Prairie-chicken. Although much work has been accomplished (E.g., it is a NFWF keystone species, state agencies have developed a conservation plan, the BLM is addressing issues related to the species, etc.) more is needed if we are to save this species from extinction. The Committee would like to encourage FSA and NRCS to develop a nationally focused initiative for the Lesser Prairie-chicken in order to increase the impact NRCS/FSA programs are having on the land (see action item below).

Farming for wildlife – The Nature Conservancy is piloting a 3 year project in with partners in with Skagit Delta farmers to incorporate flooding into their crop rotations to create important wetland habitat for shorebirds as well as maintain family farms. After the 3 year pilot project is complete, TNC will learn which practices are successful and can be replicated in other areas of the country. See the TNC website for more information

(<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/washington/misc/art21531.html>).

Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) – Charlie Rewa presented on CEAP. He handed out a table that included information on all the assessment projects. It can be accessed at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/nri/ceap/wildlife.html>. They continue to work closely with the bird community and especially the Joint Ventures (JVs). Many of the projects in the table are related to birds. They have also started doing some Sage Grouse monitoring in connection with the Sage Grouse Initiative. For example, they are working with BLM to determine the impacts of juniper removal. C. Rewa also passed out a report on the response of Bobwhite Quail and upland songbirds to the CP33 practice (see NRCS report on website). The report illustrates the positive impacts on both quail and upland songbirds.

Actions: Dave Mehlman, Jen Mock Schaeffer, David Pashley and Deb Hahn will craft a draft letter to the Secretary of Agriculture, Chief of the NRCS and the FSA Administrator to raise the awareness of the plight of the Lesser Prairie-chicken and ask that they develop a national program to help mitigate impacts to the species. The letter will be drafted ASAP since FSA and NRCS are already discussing the future emphasis of the CRP and GRP programs. The Committee would like the Private Lands Subcommittee to update the partner and NRCS biologist map to show progress.

Oil Spill Update – Dave Gagner provided an update on oil spill recovery efforts. NFWF's focus was on migratory birds and turtles. They have worked with partners, many in the bird community, to determine where to focus the funds. They are also working with a few of their major corporate contributors to add funds to the effort. They have sent funds to impacted refuges and have worked with Audubon on lands such as the Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary. Fedex has contributed to sea turtle relocations. They do not know the success rate of this effort but hope to be able to show some success in the near term. For more information see their website (http://www.nfwf.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=NFWF_Gulf_Response). You can also sign up for oil spill updates on the USFWS website (<http://www.fws.gov/>). Additionally the USFWS Duck Stamp program unveiled a special edition Federal Duck Stamp envelope known as a silk cachet, that hunters, stamp collectors and other conservationists can purchase for \$25 to help conservation efforts in the Gulf of Mexico. The funds will be used to acquire wetlands for inclusion in the more than thirty-eight national wildlife refuges along the Gulf Coast (<http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/>).

Supporting Joint Venture – Arthur Feinstein is the Chair of the Association of Joint Venture Management Boards. He acknowledged the importance of the 2009 meeting but is realistic that we cannot get all the JV Coordinators and some of their board members together once a year. He would like to set up some more regular communications with the JV Coordinators and find ways for the Coordinators to inform their Board members of NABCI activities. This would also assist JV Coordinators in reporting back to NABCI on their priorities that NABCI might be able to assist with achieving. The most important action the Committee can take for JVs is to continue to supporting funding on the Hill and support JVs at meetings with federal agencies, state and federal policy makers, and other partners.

Actions: The Committee will continue to support JV funding needs and promote the importance of JVS at meetings with federal agencies, state and federal policy makers, and other partners. Ken Kriese will send out the meeting overview that Deb Hahn produces after the meetings and quarterly updates to the Coordinators to keep them informed.

The Committee closed the meeting by thanking John Hoskins for his service as Chair.