

Rice and Waterbirds Working Group Conference Call – 3rd January 2008, 2 pm (US) EST

Participants: Chris Elphick, Catherine Hickey, Katharine Parsons, Jennifer Wheeler
Paul Baicich

Apologies from Charles, Garry, Daniel, and Sammy

Kathy led big picture discussion of RWWG—accomplishments and next steps. Goals of discussion: 1) to check in on significant accomplishments re science and stakeholders; 2) to set big picture vision for next 18-24 mo; 3) to evaluate RWWG capacity for implementation and 4) identify next steps for RWWG (possibly including recruitment, creation of task groups, member support for institutional projects). Asked for changes or comments on agenda. Participants agreed major goal of the call is to evaluate where the group is and where it should go next.

1. SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Science—Chris led discussion of symposium and proceedings; described what these products do and not do toward our goals of dissemination, comprehensive summary of best management practices, and scientific capacity development. The overarching goal of the project has been to summarize what we know and what we do not. The proceedings is coming together well—no significant gaps in terms of material covered. Will need synthesis and summary to delineate what future research is needed. Relevant management information contained in proceedings but proceedings not intended for non-scientific audience. Significant task will be to “translate” science-based information for other audiences including conservationists and rice growing community.
- Stakeholders—
 - Regional Workshops--Chris and Catherine led discussion of Argentina workshop and planned California workshop. Both can serve as models for assessing local needs, engaging partners, and developing action on the ground. Information will be forthcoming from Argentina workshop on agreed-to next steps. Another workshop is scheduled to take place in Colombia in 2008. Expected outcomes of California workshop are being developed (workshop to take place mid-summer 2008).
 - Industry analysis—Jennifer described outcomes of University of Maryland conservation problem-solving project which details avenues for the RWWG to engage the rice industry in habitat conservation. The graduate student members of the team produced a report that describes the structure of the rice industry in the western hemisphere, identifies economic, land use, policy and social factors impacting rice production, and points the RWWG toward opportunities for collaboration. Take-home messages include 1) many opportunities and relative receptiveness of industry, and 2) appropriate scale for rice and bird conservation collaborative efforts is at the local/regional scale (similar conclusion from Barcelona panel discussion)
- Communications—Jennifer updated participants on status of website and listserv. Additional communications efforts possible depending on RWWG near-term objectives.

2. ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OF RWWG VISION

- Given that most actual accomplishment of bird conservation in rice habitats is likely to occur through the work of local stakeholders at a regional scale, participants discussed near-term role of RWWG
- Reviewed RWWG Purpose and goals--Purpose: To promote conservation of aquatic birds using habitats associated with rice cultivation, by addressing needs associated with research, identification and promotion of best management practices, and outreach. Goals: 1) To develop capacity to conserve aquatic birds using rice habitats by engaging in productive dialogue with the rice industry and other stakeholders; 2) To understand the relationship between birds and rice

cultivation including dimensions that are ecological, agronomic, economic and social; 3) To develop management and policy recommendations to optimize the bird/rice relationship; and 4) To communicate and promote conservation and related marketing strategies to and with all stakeholders.

- Agreed that RWWG can play a strategic role in promoting bird conservation through additional activities such as ones accomplished during the last year--connecting stakeholders, providing information and tools, raising awareness
- In addition, RWWG can support member institutions in local efforts—e.g. workshops, assistance with access to funding as possible (e.g. King Rail as USFWS focal species), helping to develop blueprints for regional projects
- Because of the need for local-scale engagement, there are limits on what RWWG can do. Main things are perhaps (a) clearing house for information and (b) development of general approaches to creating local engagement and actually effecting improved waterbird conservation.

3. NEXT STEPS

- Forthcoming or new information products discussed that will leverage future activities include:
 - 1) identification of research needs (to be included in proceedings),
 - 2) Best Practices compilation—both of existing practices and distillation of habitat requirements and use information contained in proceedings to propose innovative practices for testing; expected to be somewhat general but potentially forming a basis upon which regional modifications may be made,
 - 3) quantitative analysis of importance of rice habitats for bird populations; importance of current habitat “stock,” and bird conservation advances that could be made if rice habitats managed optimally (essentially a goal-setting exercise, possibly to be included in proceedings, linked to documented waterbird declines),
 - 4) prioritization of regions for further RWWG sponsored work based on several parameters including urgency of bird conservation needs, opportunity for collaborative work, likelihood of success, other
- Next steps need to involve agencies & conservation groups in a more active way
- Need to discuss specific goals re: dissemination of management information; enlistment of industry/rice growers in bird conservation (on the ground, through marketing); information development; regional case studies
- Need to discuss implementation—RWWG membership, creation of task groups, timeline, industry engagement, making inroads at local level
- Specific immediate tasks:
 - Chris to structure Mar conference call to address above and/or assign task group
 - Chris – contact UMD students about summarizing their report for the proceedings
 - Jennifer – contact UMD students about sending report out to contributors and then getting moving towards posting it on-line
 - Kathy – write up and distribute meeting notes.
- Next conference call Mar 6th 2pm EST