



Migratory Bird Program Strategic Plan



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How We Got Here

Partners suggested the Migratory Bird Program - working with Partners - consider the following actions:

Our Stakeholders Told Us:

Partners suggested the Migratory Bird Program - working with Partners - consider the following actions:

1. Develop and communicate KEY national and regional migratory bird messages.
2. Work through priority partnerships to achieve measurable conservation outcomes.
3. Coordinate national and regional actions and investments on migratory bird priorities.
4. Measure progress toward defined conservation outcomes & refine efforts based on learning.



Suggested Operational Improvements:

Create Decision Support Models

To address birds of management concern

- Replicate waterfowl model.
- Include habitat factors.
- Life-cycle management.
- Multi-species emphasis.

Coordinate Data Acquisition and Management

For mutually identified priorities and needs

- Define priority data needs.
- Determine management risk.
- Identify data sources and providers.
- Provide data to partners.

Streamline permitting and regulatory functions

For mutually identified priorities and needs

- Consistency of approach.
- Outsource, where possible.
- Speed up process.
- Develop Best Management Practices.
- Automate.
- Reduce compliance burden & cost.

From Strategy to Implementation

Steps to Implementation.

- **Built the project-level Plan view Fall of 2017.**
- **In 2018, mapped the Migratory Bird Strategy to the Secretary's Priorities.**
- **Used the Plan to prioritize National investments in FY18.**
- **The next round of Plan prioritization and investment will occur May of 2019.**



Why We Do It

Vision: Healthy bird populations valued by the American public

Core Values:

What We Hold Dear

- The passion and excellence of our employees.
- Socio-economic benefits that result from healthy bird populations & habitats
- Contributions of and collaborations with all people and organizations that benefit migratory birds.
- Transparent, informed decisions based on the best available information.

Guiding Principles:

What Drives Our Work. We:

- Support engaging in effective partnerships to conserve and manage migratory birds.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of our work and our partnerships.
- Focus on benefits to multiple species and their habitats.
- Work with migratory birds at the scales appropriate to their management.
- Use our strategic priorities to focus our efforts and resources.
- Leverage partner resources and avoid duplication of effort.
- Coordinate data collection and analysis that supports management decisions.

Our Unique Role

- Our trust responsibility is to manage migratory birds as identified in international treaties with Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Russia that are implemented through the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- Our primary focus is on those species that appear in the Birds of Management Concern list (BMC), defined as birds of conservation concern, conflict species, and species for which we hold hunting seasons.

What We Do: Our 4 Priority Goals

Mission: Leadership in migratory bird conservation and management through effective partnerships, applied science, and innovative strategies

Through professional public service, we serve the American public to achieve the following goals:

1. Provide Leadership in Migratory Bird Conservation.
2. Conserve and Manage Sustainable Populations of Birds of Management Concern.
3. Conserve Habitat for Migratory Birds of Management Concern.
4. Manage Bird Data and Information for Use in Decision Making.

The strategies, goals and objectives below were developed as an ambitious map to serve the Migratory Bird Program for the next decade. Implementation of any of the actions described below is subject to annual appropriations and program priorities. The Migratory Bird Program can only invest in a subset of these actions each year. Objectives in the plan are written at a level that allows the Migratory Bird Leadership Team to annually prioritize work effort and budget allocations.



1. Provide Leadership in Migratory Bird Conservation

The USFWS has been a leader in migratory bird conservation since the founding of the Service. Our efforts focus migratory bird conservation at large flyway and continental scales. We identify and coordinate with our State, Federal and nonprofit partners to respond to emerging conservation and hunting issues. We work with our partners to build public understanding of migratory bird conservation. We also lead the federal family in bird conservation issues.

1.1. Identify significant issues related to Birds of Management Concern and provide leadership to address them at flyway scales

- 1.1.1 Develop criteria to select Birds of Management Concern target species on which to focus conservation attention within 1 year. Take advantage of prior efforts such as Focal Species, and the work of multispecies working groups such as those for marine birds, grassland birds, and shorebirds.
- 1.1.2 Within 6 months of selecting priority species or species groups in Objective 1.1.1, evaluate those species that would benefit from developing Conservation, Management, or Business plans, or from developing new or providing support for existing Working Groups for individual species or for species groups.
- 1.1.3 Engage partners within existing structures, such as AFWA, Flyways, Bird Initiatives, and Joint Ventures, to identify: significant factors affecting Birds of Management Concern; achievable solutions; and partners and partnerships that can provide leadership to best address those factors. Create a summary document within 1 year.
- 1.1.4 Assess and strengthen the support of flyway councils for improving coordinated conservation action with states. Coordinate among Service-designated flyway liaisons before all flyway technical committee meetings to sharpen messaging and improve our abilities to serve flyway councils.

1.2 Work with partners to increase appreciation and support for bird conservation

Improve communication and messaging of both the Migratory Bird Program's and partners' program accomplishments in advancing bird conservation as a vehicle for increasing overall awareness, understanding, and support for migratory bird conservation.

- 1.2.1 Develop and deliver strategic messages and materials with partners that will result in increased awareness, understanding and support for migratory bird conservation.
- 1.2.2 Determine how the public values and connects with birds.
- 1.2.3 Work through new, innovative Fish and Wildlife Service communications processes to maximize outreach and education about migratory bird conservation to the American public.

1.3 Facilitate migratory bird conservation with other Federal partner agencies

- 1.3.1 Seek efficiencies by working collaboratively with other Federal partners to minimize duplication of effort in respective work plans, reduce threats, and to maximize communication about emerging issues that affect migratory birds.



2. Conserve and Manage Sustainable Populations of Birds of Management Concern

One of our core responsibilities is managing game species to provide for recreational and subsistence hunting opportunities and authorizing take of migratory birds in a manner that is compatible with the four international treaties. We must strive for continual improvements and efficiency in issuing permits while maintaining sustainable populations of birds.

2.1 Provide for recreational hunting and subsistence use of migratory birds

- 2.1.1 Work with States to refine how we structure hunting seasons to maximize hunting opportunities commensurate with maintaining sustainable populations of harvested species. Working cooperatively with the Flyway Councils, evaluate new technologies and approaches can enhance hunting opportunities.
- 2.1.2 Work through the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council to provide subsistence hunting opportunities for rural residents of Alaska while maintaining sustainable bird populations.
- 2.1.3. Work with tribes to provide hunting frameworks on tribal lands and ceded lands while maintaining sustainable bird populations.
- 2.1.4 Design, conduct, and evaluate migratory bird monitoring programs to collect population data needed to establish annual migratory bird hunting regulations, evaluate impact of harvest on hunted species, and improve the management of harvested species.

2.2. Work with stakeholders and partners on managing species conflicts to balance societal needs with our obligation to maintain sustainable migratory bird populations

- 2.2.1 Develop a new approach to identify, evaluate, and address migratory bird species conflicts that ensures input by stakeholders and a transparent decision based on defensible methods.
- 2.2.2 Work with Flyway Councils to design, maintain, and conduct migratory bird monitoring programs to collect population data needed to establish take levels for species conflicts. Engage the Branch of Assessment and Decision Support to apply assessment expertise and evaluate impact of take and improve conflict species management. Information will be needed for the Service to evaluate any management options focused on lethal take.



2.3 Implement an efficient permitting program that has a strong biological foundation

2.3.1 Modernize the Service's Migratory Bird Program permitting technology, governance, and processes

- 2.3.1.1 Define the governance process for permit policy decisions and coordinating between regions and headquarters. In the next 6 months, the Migratory Bird Leadership Team will charter an integrated team to define the process for policy and decision making in the permit program.
- 2.3.1.2 Build an efficient and modern web-based electronic permit (e-permit) system. The e-permit system will include fully electronic application, payment, reporting, and permitting; connectivity with the Injury and Mortality Reporting system and ECOS; and advanced data querying, viewing, summary, export and analysis capabilities to facilitate the use of data for management decisions.
- 2.3.1.3 Once the new electronic permitting system is operational, evaluate options to ensure cost recovery, including review of permit tenure and fee exemptions (consistent with OMB Circular A-25).

2.3.2 Develop consistent approaches to permit issuance across Fish and Wildlife Service Regions

- 2.3.2.1 Support the permit program staff through training, professional development, and mentoring. This investment will benefit staff, the Service, and our customers.
- 2.3.3.2 Review manual chapters and standard operating procedures to ensure consistent program implementation.
- 2.3.2.3 Strengthen the biological foundation by which the program issues permits to ensure legally and biologically defensible take allowances.
- 2.3.4.4 Improve customer service and efficiency by implementing a modern system for on-line submission of permit applications that provides more efficient access to application information and permits, while providing staff and customers the data needed to help make management decisions.

2.4 Work with partners to develop and implement voluntary approaches to reduce bird mortality

- 2.4.1 Provide comprehensive technical assistance and support to federal agencies and partners, emphasizing compatible use and alleviation of human-bird conflicts in the context of population sustainability.



3. Conserve Habitat for Migratory Birds of Management Concern

Because the quantity, quality, availability, and distribution of habitats are important drivers of bird populations, the loss and degradation of natural habitats are key factors in the declines of many migratory bird species. Ensuring the future of migratory birds requires the effective conservation of breeding, wintering, and migration habitats throughout their annual cycle to sustain populations at desired levels. Strategic, adaptive, collaborative approaches that address habitat requirements of birds at landscape scales are paramount, so that finite resources can be leveraged across organizational lines and targeted toward “local” habitat conservation actions expected to best support range-wide objectives for population sustainability.

3.1. Initiate and develop collaborative projects and approaches that advance specific strategic objectives of bird conservation plans

- 3.1.1. Develop, adopt, and implement a results-oriented conservation business planning approach for how we work with new and existing partners.
- 3.1.2. Collaborate with partners to identify objectives and prioritize habitat actions that alleviate threats to and enhance habitats of birds of management concern.

3.2. Collaborate with States and other partners to conserve and restore habitat for birds of management concern through Joint Venture Partnerships

- 3.2.1. Using partner delivery networks, prioritize, communicate, achieve, and track Joint Venture habitat goals to impact desired results in migratory bird populations.
- 3.2.2. Coordinate partner participation in state, regional, and national habitat conservation and grant programs.
- 3.2.3. Support state efforts to provide increased public access and bird-related recreation.
- 3.2.4. Work closely with states during state wildlife action plan updates to integrate and align Migratory Bird goals.

3.3. Collaborate with other Service programs and Federal partners to conserve and restore habitat for birds of management concern



3.4. Collaborate with international partners to conserve habitats of the birds of management concern across their ranges and political boundaries

- 3.4.1. Participate in or replicate regional monitoring networks/projects to establish connectivity between core breeding populations and large concentrations of non-breeding populations. Task: Develop partnerships or sister-city conservation programs based on this habitat requirements of migratory birds throughout the year.
- 3.4.2 Support the activities of major bird initiatives (e.g. Partners in Flight, North American Waterfowl Management Plan, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, North American Waterbird Conservation Plan) in establishing and refining the context for approaching bird conservation within hemispheric, continental, national and other “large geographic” scales.
- 3.4.3 Participate in the development of conservation business plans or strategies that address threats across the annual cycle of migratory birds and facilitate collaboration among international partners on achieving common goals for these species.
- 3.4.4 For a specifically prioritized list of neotropical birds, annually fund Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act projects that will improve the species population status. Proposals must include how to achieve measurable biological outcomes, indicate how progress will be monitored and data collected, and clearly outline how and when results reported.





4. Manage Bird Data and Information For use in Decision Making

Manage data as a strategic asset and a “trust resource” by developing information systems that improve customer service, government transparency, decision-making, and accessibility for the public.

4.1 Modernize bird data management including collection, storage, analysis, reporting, maintenance, and access to partners and the public

To better serve the American public, we must manage our data assets to ensure they are of the highest quality, are well documented, and are supported by transparent and efficient processes. Improve data management within the Migratory Bird Program by implementing recognized best practices, the forthcoming Service’s data governance policies, Departmental and Federal policies, and cost-effective, innovative technological solutions. To this end, we have the following specific objectives for data management:

- 4.1.1 Develop a programmatic structure to govern Migratory Bird data management and oversee internal coordination within and among FWS Regions and Headquarters. This should begin immediately and in collaboration with National FWS and DOI efforts, as well as current regional efforts.
- 4.1.2 Conduct data management in accordance with best practices with guidance from the MB data management governance team and coordination with Service-wide data management initiatives.
- 4.1.3 Adopt new and innovative approaches to data collection, maintenance, and storage that improve data quality and the efficiency of information management.

4.2 Provide analytical support to inform management decisions

- 4.2.1 Enhance the technical skills and quality of the analytical work produced by Migratory Bird staff.
- 4.2.2 Develop models, visualizations, and maps to support Migratory Bird management decisions.
- 4.2.3 Support decision analytical approaches to guide Migratory Bird technical work, project scoping, and project review.

4.3 Coordinate with partners to improve access to quality information for bird conservation and management decisions

- 4.3.1 Coordinate with partners to adopt or develop standards for monitoring programs and data analysis.
- 4.3.2 Work with partners to ensure data access, sharing, availability and participate in cooperative data management and sharing systems (e.g., Avian Knowledge Network, DataOne, data.gov).



How We Operate

1. Set Priorities

With over 1,000 migratory bird species, the Migratory Bird Program must set and follow priorities to ensure program effectiveness. We will use the following criteria to guide our work:

Primary Criteria:

- 1.1 Is the action critical to fulfill our legal obligations or part of our unique role?**
- 1.2 Is the action focused on or does it extend the reach of an identified strategy or a Department of the Interior strategy?**
- 1.3 Is the action consistent with our values and guiding principles?**

Secondary Criteria

1.4 Is anyone else doing the action?

- Can someone else do the action better or more cost efficiently?
- Does the action avoid duplicating the effective work of others?

1.5 Does the action contribute to Birds of Management Concern conservation ?

- If so, is the investment commensurate with the expected benefit?
- Are there sources of funding available?

1.6 Does the action address a specific decision or management action?

1.7 Does the action strengthen existing partnerships?

- Does it leverage partner resources/new partnerships/strengthen existing partnerships?

1.8 What is the risk of not taking action?



2. Prioritize and Support Our Most Strategic Partnerships

The scope and complexity of migratory bird issues require that we partner with others to develop and implement shared goals and objectives. We will enhance the effectiveness of existing partnerships, concurrent with developing opportunities to collaborate with others to address current and projected challenges in new and creative ways.

“Strategic partnerships” are those that directly implement defined and measurable priorities of the Migratory Bird Program.

2.1 Reallocate our resources (time, talent, funding) to the most strategic partnerships

2.1.1. Require thorough workload analysis before initiating new, regional scale partnerships outside of long established partnerships such as Joint Ventures.

2.1.2. Develop criteria to evaluate partnerships.

2.2 Define mutual benefits, goals, and roles for all strategic partnerships.

2.3 Evaluate each partner’s investment in the partnership.

2.4 Determine expected results from each partnership and measure progress.

3. Support Staff Development and Engagement

Effective leadership supports a culture of professional growth, trust and empowerment. Empowering decision-making at the lowest appropriate level requires employees’ support on a strategy, priorities, and a consistent operating framework. Additionally, the Migratory Bird Program must continue to provide challenging and unique growth opportunities for all staff through the use of details, field work, outside training, and other successful development programs.

3.1 Improve training, operating environment, trust, and employee engagement

3.2 Encourage and reward quality work and innovations that improve our customer service and timely delivery of services

3.3 Empower and develop the next generation of Migratory Bird leaders



4. Ensure Efficient Operations of the Migratory Bird Program to Deliver Consistent National Strategy

A key factor in our future success will be our ability to use our limited resources efficiently and cost-effectively in order to focus on our highest conservation priorities.

- 4.1 Clearly define roles of the regions and headquarters in implementing this strategic plan.**
- 4.2 Operate and communicate as one team.**
- 4.3 Align our programmatic resources to address identified priorities.**
- 4.4 Improve our ability to identify changes needed and more rapidly adapt to change.**
- 4.5 Use interdisciplinary teams to address priority issues. Implement team charters that include project sponsors, expected outcomes, project timelines, goals, roles, project guidance, and sidebars.**
- 4.6 Enhance overall program identity.**
- 4.7 Ensure meaningful metrics are assigned to measure the results of conservation investments.**
- 4.8 Create the tools to provide for regular project status updates.**
- 4.9 Make decisions using transparent processes.**

5. Implement Strategic Communications To Support Goals

Strategic communications are critical to any program success.

- 5.1 Ensure national priorities are communicated effectively and creatively to targeted audiences and not just through media and traditional Service outreach channels.**
- 5.2 Work with partners in countries that support migrating and wintering birds to encourage parallel communications.**

6. Implement a Risk Assessment Framework For Key Decisions

The inherent uncertainty in the potential effects of our actions means there are risks of our actions not achieving their desired results. More investments in upfront science and data collection to reduce uncertainty come at time and financial cost. We will establish a consistent approach to evaluating these trade-offs.



7. Continue to Innovate

Innovation in conservation actions and administrative processes is critical to our long-term success. We will foster a culture of innovation.

7.1 Develop an efficient process to capture, evaluate, and implement new approaches to migratory bird conservation and program management that engages our staff and partners.

8. Leverage Human Dimensions to Increase the Impact of Our Work

Wildlife management today not only involves understand biological processes, but also social processes and consequences as well. We will leverage the field of human dimensions in order to better serve the American public and improve the effectiveness of our programs.

8.1 Incorporate human dimensions into management decisions on a regional and national scale.

8.1.1. Develop a plan for getting Human Dimensions expertise at the regional level

8.2 Add human dimensions capabilities to understand the drivers of bird conservation.

8.2.1 Work formally with USFW's Human Dimensions Program to determine priorities and areas for collaboration in each region

9. Transform National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Capability

NEPA provides a powerful decision making framework that engages the American public.

9.1 Develop NEPA expertise for use by all regions.

9.2 Develop clear and concise guidance for developing NEPA documents.

9.3 Develop new “programmatic” approaches to NEPA that apply nationally and across all Service Regions.

10. Implement an Annual Comprehensive Review of Essential Training for Employees and Prioritize Training Resource Investments.