

North American Waterfowl Management Plan

SCIENCE SUPPORT TEAM



Venturing Forward

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Summer 2008



North American Waterfowl Management Plan Science Support Team

Venturing Forward

The NAWMP Science Support Team's newsletter, "Venturing Forward" is published quarterly and distributed to all NAWMP partners interested in progress relative to the NAWMP's science foundations.

The NAWMP's Plan Committee, the NAWMP Science Support Team's (NSST) Executive Committee and the NSST Committee Chairs all contribute regular updates and news to this newsletter for the benefit of all NAWMP partners and stakeholders as we strive to "Venture Forward."

Contributors are invited to submit news items, photos, articles, comments etc. to the editor of "Venturing Forward":

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Table with 2 columns: Issue Name and Deadline. Spring Issue March 1, Summer Issue June 1, Fall Issue September 1, Winter Issue December 1.

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- NSST Executive Committee (Mark Gloutney, Chair)
Joint Task Group Report Review Committee (Jorge L. Coppen, Chair)
JV Implementation and Evaluation Plan Review Committee (Mike Brasher, Chair)
Landscape Monitoring Committee (Tim Jones, Chair)
NWI Working Group (Rex Johnson, Chair)
Alternative Performance metrics Working Group (Pat Devers, Chair)
Regional Population Abundance Objective Committee (Mark Petrie, Chair)

NSST Action Groups

- Pintail Action Group (Jim DeVries, Chair)
Scaup Action Team (Jane Austin, Chair)

PHOTO CREDITS
Front Cover: Ring-necked ducks by John & Karen Hollingsworth
Back Cover: Harlequins by Arron Arnell



Plan Committee Vision

By Paul Schmidt & Basile VanHavre

Coming out of the Continental Assessment (Assessment) of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, we feel a renewed energy and perhaps rebirth of the Plan and its many partners committed to the goals. These are certainly interesting and unsettling times as we face some very daunting challenges that are affecting our natural and cultural landscapes. We are seeing some significant economic shifts in the agricultural and energy sectors have huge impacts on the natural landscape that we need for waterfowl. We are wondering where the cultural changes are taking us in terms of the waterfowl hunting traditions. Evidence is clear that global warming will change the natural landscape in dramatic fashion.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan has been a unique and effective tool to address past challenges and we are confident we can build on this success to address these new ones. As co-chairs of the Plan Committee, we are committed to guiding this effort through a time of dramatic changes.

The Assessment gave us a road map to increased success, and we intend to use that map as we make our way over the next few years. We have taken the Assessment to heart, and begun to implement actions to deal with the more than two dozen significant continental recommendations. We have formed four working subcommittees of the Plan Committee to work on the science, funding, policy, and leadership/communications recommendations from the Assessment.

Since last year we have had several meetings and conference calls to reengage our relationships with and improve our understanding of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (U.S. and Canadian) and have begun a process that will have us meeting with representatives of each joint venture over the course of the next several years. For instance, in our recent meeting in Prince Edward Island on July 7, we received reports and heard outstanding presentations from representatives of the Sea Duck Joint Venture, Black Duck Joint Venture, Eastern Habitat Joint Venture and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. This forum gave us a great opportunity to engage in a productive

dialogue. We plan to continue this by meeting with three or four more joint ventures at the next meeting in the winter.

The NSST is key contributor to our effort. We see it contributing on two levels: On one had, a coordination of R&D work done by all NAWMP partners is needed and the NSST is uniquely placed to guide us to ensure coherence and effectiveness. On the other the traditional role of the NSST (addressing science challenge that crosses joint venture boundaries) will remain important.

The continental assessment clearly identified that our challenges reaches beyond biology and habitat sciences into the realm of policy development. We should consider whether this is a challenge that the NSST should take on or whether separate specialized capacity could better tackle such issues.

We are keenly interested in the upcoming Future of Waterfowl Workshop in the Minneapolis, MN, August 26-28. It is clear that new thinking, processes and structures will be needed to address the challenges we face. The coherence of habitat, harvest and human dimensions is paramount if we are to be smarter at how we deal with the challenges ahead. We can no longer think in terms of doing more or doing "it" faster as a solution. We must do conservation smarter! We are in a marathon, not a sprint. The North American Plan Committee is in this for the long haul.



Thanks to our Canadian partners for coordinating a fruitful and pleasant meeting at the Rodd Brudenell Resort in beautiful Prince Edward Island, Canada.



Paul Schmidt is Assistant Director Migratory Birds and State Programs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and currently serves as a Plan Committee Co-chair.



Basile VanHavre is Director - Population Conservation Management Division Canadian Wildlife Service -Environment Canada and currently serves as a Plan Committee Co-chair.



NSST NEWS

NSST Chair's Message

NSST Members:

I am pleased to introduce the first NSST quarterly newsletter. The intent of the newsletter is to provide a communication tool to keep NSST members apprised of NSST activities. Given that the bulk of our work occurs at the committee level, the newsletter provides the opportunity for committees to report on progress and issues. The newsletter arises in response to clear messaging about need for greater communication in last falls NSST membership survey. I also view this as an important tool to communicate with the Plan Committee and the Joint Venture Coordinators.

I am please to welcome Kathy Dickson from CWS – Ottawa to the NSST. Kathy is replacing Eric Reed who is on paternity leave. Kathy will be part of the NSST executive.

I would also like to acknowledge the commitment of those who have stepped up to help Mike Brasher with the NSST reviews of implementation plans for 4 emerging JV's.

The NSST executive has focused on the following activities over the last quarter:

- Responding to the NSST membership survey. This has resulted in a focus on enhanced communication (i.e. monthly NSST executive staff calls, and bimonthly calls with Plan Committee Co-chairs).
- Development of ideas related to next steps in monitoring net landscape change.
- Revision of NSST project funding guidelines
- Development of an NSST membership skills survey. I envision that this survey will help us better understand the capacity of the NSST and enable strategic recruitment of complementary skill sets to the team.



Mark Gloutney, NSST Chair

BULLETIN BOARD

Meetings of Interest

**NSST Alternative Performance
Metrics Workshop
August 5–6, 2008
Patuxent Wildlife Research Center
Laurel, MD**

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**Fall NSST meeting
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
October 15-16, 2008**

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**Plan Committee meeting
Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico
Jan. 27-28 & 29 2009**

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Joint Task Group Report Review Committee

By Jorge L. Coppen

At their meeting at Savannah, GA January 9-11, 2007, the Plan Committee identified top science priorities distilled from the NAWMP Continental Progress Assessment Report (Assessment) which included Recommendation 20: *“The Plan Committee should advocate that waterfowl harvest and habitat managers develop a coherent and coordinated approach for setting and achieving Plan objectives.”*

Subsequently, the Plan Committee developed *management responses* to recommendations in the Assessment including a response to Recommendation 20 as follows: *“The Plan Committee recognizes that harvest policy can potentially influence whether the Plan’s population objectives are met through its habitat conservation efforts. The Plan Committee will review the report and recommendations of the Joint Task Group (JTG) on NAWMP Goals and Harvest Management for direction and opportunities to unify waterfowl management at the continental scale incorporating habitat, harvest and socio-economic considerations.”*

The NSST was identified as a primary responsible entity in Recommendation 21: *“The NSST should be revitalized to tackle several follow-on assignments from this assessment and from the parallel JTG...”*

The **NSST JTG Report Review Committee** is composed of: Jorge Coppen, NAWMP National Coordinator (Chair); Greg Soulliere, Science Coordinator, Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Region JV; Rob Holbrook, Science Coordinator, Central Valley JV and Duane Pool., Migratory Bird Program Coordinator for The Nature Conservancy. The committee developed a *draft* scoping document that: 1) Identified and summarized six issue areas important to the habitat side of the issue; 2) Presented them in a sequence that would aid the process of integrating habitat and harvest management; and 3) Developed prioritized NSST recommendations addressing issues, rated as high, medium or low priority.

The six issue areas were:

1) NAWMP-AHM Working Group – technical integration of waterfowl management

How will we approach integration? Under what model will we function?

What about relevant habitat features not currently accounted for in modeling efforts (U.S. ponds, grasslands)?

2) Linking regional habitat objectives to Continental carrying capacity

Need to develop models linking local habitat management with continental waterfowl demography

3) Need to clarify the key sources of ecological uncertainty for habitat managers such as the functional form of density dependence

4) Implications of a “shoulder strategy” for habitat management

What are the trade-offs?

What revisions are needed to current population objectives?

5) Viewpoint for a consensus re: NSST actions

Institutional means and resources to pursue joint technical matters that integrate harvest and habitat management. The PC needs to address NSST expectations for further involvement.

6) Enhancing NSST technical capacity to address JTG recommendations

What capacities do we need to move forward?

It was also observed that a dialogue at the policy level will be required in the review of Plan objectives leading up to the 2009 Plan Update.

Our committee presented this draft scoping document at the NSST meeting held on June 5, 2007 in Minneapolis, MN. The scoping document consisted of an executive summary and a summary review followed by recommendations to address the issues cited. We reviewed the approach taken by the JTG Report Review Committee to develop the JTG scoping document.

The NSST collectively espoused the notion that it would be prudent to postpone deliberations until after the Future of Waterfowl Workshop scheduled for August 26-28, 2008, is completed to allow clear articulation of the implications of the JTG report. More habitat-side implications must be explored before the NSST can make cogent recommendations.

Hence, the NSST drafted a memo to the Plan Committee in support of the JTG recommendations “in concept” but that further considerations were warranted before NSST recommendations are proposed. We look forward to *venturing forward* on that in 2009.



Jorge L. Coppen is the National Coordinator of the NAWMP and serves as the primary NSST representative to the Plan Committee. He currently chairs the Joint Task Group Report Review Committee





NSST Regional Population Abundance Objectives Workshop Announcement

By Jorge L. Coppen

This workshop will be held at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and is scheduled for October 1-3, 2008. The workshop is sponsored by the NSST's Regional Population Abundance Objectives Committee. Members include: Mark Petrie (Chair), Science Coordinator, Pacific Coast JV; Mike Brasher, Biological Team Leader, Gulf Coast JV; Jorge Coppen, NAWMP National Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Duane Pool, Science Coordinator, Migratory Bird Program, The Nature Conservancy; Ryan Reker, Evaluation Coordinator, Rainwater Basin JV; Greg Soullierre, Science Coordinator, Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Region JV; and John Tirpak, Science Coordinator, Lower Mississippi Valley JV.

The purpose of the workshop is to identify a set of preferred options for formulating regional scale (i.e., JV, WCR) waterfowl population abundance objectives that are explicitly and consistently linked to continental population abundance objectives across both space (i.e., JV and WCR boundaries) and time (i.e., the entire annual life cycle).

Biological models describing species-habitat relationships are frequently used to translate population objectives into habitat conservation objectives that ultimately influence habitat delivery programs. Thus, improvements in habitat conservation efficiencies of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan hinge upon population abundance objectives that maintain a strong linkage to continental population goals and minimize redundancies among regions that possess shared responsibilities for conserving waterfowl habitats. Different JVs currently utilize different approaches for linking regional and continental objectives. Establishing standards for developing regional population objectives from appropriate datasets will facilitate the ability of individual Joint Ventures to inform achievement of population objectives at the continental scale.

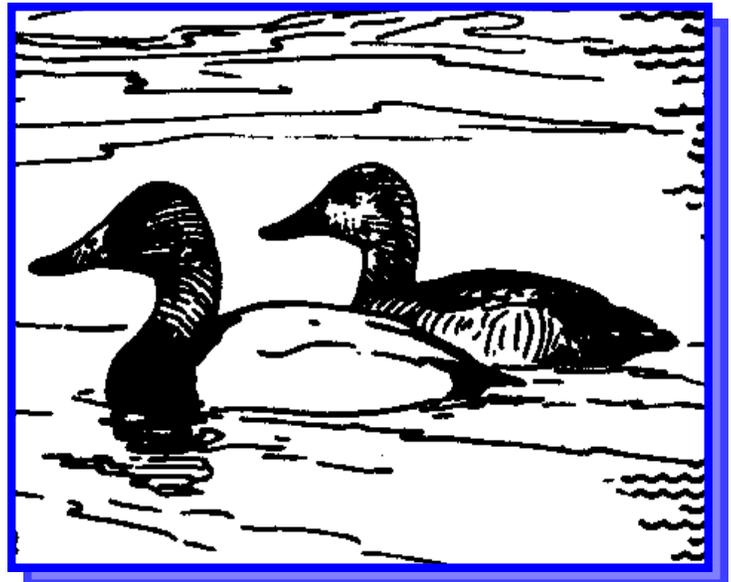
Workshop objectives include: 1) Describe current approaches for formulating population abundance objectives for breeding, migrating, and wintering waterfowl within JV or WCR boundaries; 2) Critically evaluate the assumptions and data sources now used to formulate population abundance objectives for breeding, migrating, and wintering waterfowl within JV or WCR boundaries;

3) Conclude whether our current approaches to formulating population abundance objectives within JV or WCR boundaries are adequate; 4) Provide recommendations to JVs about what methods and necessary data sources are needed to formulate regional-scale population abundance objectives that provide a strong connection to continental population goals.

Workshop attendees will agree on a set of recommendations for standardizing efforts to formulate waterfowl population abundance objectives at the regional scale.

Results and recommendations from the workshop will be submitted in the form of a report, written by the NSST's Regional Population Abundance Objectives Committee, to the full NSST at sometime in the near future for review and comment. Approval by the NAWMP Plan Committee of the final recommendations will be sought at their winter 2009 meeting.

A small group of Joint Venture Science Coordinators and representatives from Flyway Councils, State and Federal Agencies and Academia have been invited to participate in this workshop. Participants were selected based upon a combination of geographic or entity representation, subject matter expertise, and experience in the waterfowl conservation community.



Jorge L. Coppen is the National Coordinator of the NAWMP and serves as the primary NSST representative to the Plan Committee. He currently serves on the NSST Regional Population Objectives committee.





NSST Alternative Performance Metrics Workshop
By Jorge L. Coppen

The NSST's Alternative Performance Metrics Committee is hosting a two-day workshop to be held at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD, 5-6 August 2008. The purpose of the workshop is to explore the need to develop a set of alternative metrics to measure progress in achieving the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The NSST Alternative Performance Metrics committee is populated by: Pat Devers, Chair and Science Coordinator for the Black Duck JV; Greg Balkom, NSST Atlantic Flyway Rep.; Tim Jones, Science Coordinator of the Atlantic Coast JV; Jim Dubovsky, Chief of USFWS Region 6 Migratory Game Bird Management; Dave Howerter, Manager Institute for Wetland and Waterfowl Research for Ducks Unlimited—Canada and Prairie Habitat JV Rep.; Stuart Slattery, Research Scientist, Institute for Wetland and Waterfowl Research at Ducks Unlimited—Canada and Boreal Rep. for Prairie Habitat JV; and Jorge L. Coppen, NAWMP National Coordinator.

The objectives of the workshop are to:

- 1) Understand the biological and administrative need for new alternative metrics that apply across joint ventures;
- 2) Identify candidate metrics;
- 3) Develop an objective process to evaluate and select preferred metrics;
- and 4) Achieve consensus around a limited number (1–3) of preferred alternative metrics for implementation under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

We have identified a small group of joint venture Science Coordinators and representatives from the Flyway Councils and Federal Agencies to participate in this workshop. Participants were selected to pro-

vide broad representation, skills, and backgrounds from the waterfowl community. Results and recommendations from the workshop will be submitted as a report, written by the organizing committee, to the full NSST by November for consideration and approval. The NSST will then submit a recommendation to the NAWMP Committee concerning the adoption or rejection of the workshop findings. To facilitate progress during the workshop we had asked participants to submit a list of potential alternative metrics (≤0.5 page description each) to Pat Devers, Chair by 5 July. A synthesis of proposed metrics will be sent to all participants prior to the workshop for review and consideration. We have also included several manuscripts that provide useful background material related to the goals and objectives of this workshop.



Pat Devers indicated that the NSST Alternative Performance Metrics workshop will occur as scheduled. He explained that the committee structured the workshop to allow for a smaller group to enhance opportunities to engage on the workshop objectives and therefore enhance suc-

cess. Two representatives each were invited from wintering, migration and breeding JVs. Representatives from federal agencies and Flyway Councils rounded out the invitee list. Seth Mott, Chief of the branch of Science and Planning in the USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation was invited to provide background on the need for developing alternative performance metrics. Related administrative and policy needs and biological justifications would be discussed.

Jorge L. Coppen is the National Coordinator of the NAWMP and serves as the primary NSST representative to the Plan Committee. He currently serves on the NSST Performance Metrics Committee.





Joint Venture Implementation Plan Review Committee Quarterly Update

By Mike Brasher, Chair

Current membership of the NSST Joint Venture Implementation Plan Review Committee includes Mike Brasher Biological Team Leader, Gulf Coast JV (Chair) and John Tirpak, Science Coordinator, Lower Mississippi Valley JV

We experienced earlier this year the departure of original member and previous Committee Chair, Brian Sullivan, when he resigned from his Playa Lakes Joint Venture Science Coordinator position to pursue new career opportunities. Brian's presence and leadership on this committee will be missed.

We have not yet initiated active recruitment of additional members, but anyone wishing to increase their level of NSST participation is certainly welcome to volunteer their involvement.

This committee was formed in 2006 for the primary purposes of drafting language to guide development and/or updating of JV Implementation Plans and when needed, being the NSST body responsible for reviewing and commenting on JV progress reports.

Spring and summer 2008 has been a busy time for this committee with Implementation Plans from four new Joint Ventures (i.e., Appalachian Mountains, East Gulf Coastal Plain, Rio Grande, and Sonoran [Waterfowl Management Supplement only]) already received for review and comment. Because of this pulse of review needs and our limited committee membership, we have been seeking assistance with Implementation Plan reviews from the entire NSST membership.

By the time you receive this newsletter, reviews for the East Gulf Coastal Plain JV Implementation Plan and Sonoran JV waterfowl supplement should be completed, and reviewers for the Appalachian Mountains and Rio Grande JV Implementation Plans should be identified. Many thanks to those individuals that have provided or otherwise agreed to provide Implementation Plan reviews!

We also are working with the NSST Executive Committee and Plan Committee to more clearly define this committee's role in reviews of Joint Venture Progress Reports. We hope to share more information on this topic in subsequent newsletters.



Mike Brasher, a Ducks Unlimited employee, is the Gulf Coast Joint Venture's Science Coordinator and is stationed at Lafayette, Louisiana





Scaup Action Team News

By Jane E. Austin, Ph.D.

First annual meeting of the Scaup Action Team is held: The Scaup Action Team (SAT) met for the first time on 27–28 February at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in concert with the Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section. Thirty-six biologists from the U.S. and Canada attended, including individuals from all four flyways.

Participants assessed progress on issues identified in the 2006 scaup workshop, highlighted new activities or information, identified four action items to further advance scaup information and research needs, and formally elected a chair (Jane Austin) and vice-chair (Steve Cordts) for the next two years.

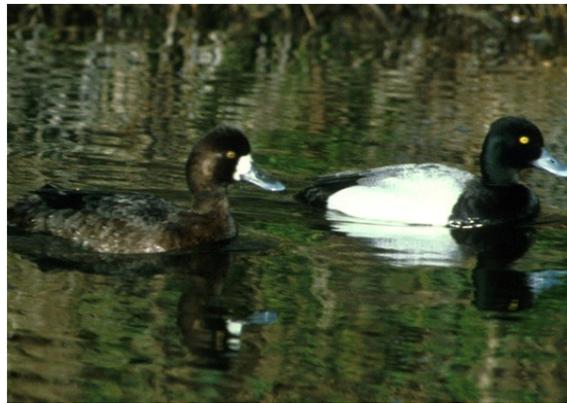
An Advisory Board has been formed to provide the Chair with interim discussions and guidance of SAT actions and planning; members include representation of FWS, Canada, and the four flyways, and at-large members.

For two action items, scoping documents have been distributed to the board for review and discussion on how to advance the issues: a proposal to complete his investigation of techniques for identifying breeding activity using post-ovulatory follicles (Mike Eichholz), and a proposal for developing various educational resources, including digital vid-

eos and images, to help biologists, hunters, and others better distinguish greater and lesser scaup under field conditions (Jack Barclay).

Development of a Scaup Conservation Action Plan: Jane Austin received funding from FWS to develop a conservation action plan for greater and lesser scaup during 2008–2009. The work will be conducted under the auspices of SAT. The plan will include a synthesis of recent information on greater

and lesser scaup, identification of affiliations among, and important areas and habitats used on wintering, migration, and breeding areas; status of habitat and area; conservation threats; monitoring programs; and current programs or actions that benefit scaup needs.



A series of regional workshops will be held in the U.S. and Canada to review this information and develop a working conservation plan for both scaup species, using a structured decision-making process, with a focus on assessment of monitoring, research, and conservation actions.

Jane will be soliciting information on regional aspects and involvement with workshops in the upcoming months.

Jane Austin, Ph.D. is a Research Wildlife Biologist with USGS at Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in Bismarck, ND and current SAT Chair.





Pintail Action Group News

By Jim Devries

The Pintail Action Group has embarked on an exciting effort to unite habitat and harvest management for pintails. In early May of this year, a task team made up of Mike Runge (USGS), Scott Boomer (FWS), John Eadie (Univ. California Davis), Bob Clark (CWS), Joe Fleskes (USGS), Todd Sanders (FWS), Wayne Thogmartin (USGS), Dave Koons (Utah State Univ.), Mike Anderson (DU), and Jim Devries (DU) met to flesh out the necessary components of a unified demographic model for pintails that incorporates breeding and wintering habitat influences on vital rates as well as harvest influence. This model is envisioned to simultaneously estimate abundance, survival, reproduction, and movement associated with two core breeding areas (PPR and Alaska) and two core wintering areas (California and Gulf Coast), all of which can be linked to environmental conditions, population density, and location-specific management actions. A product of the workshop was a USGS Science Support Program proposal seeking support for initial modeling work in FY09. A work plan also is in development which will outline the objectives, timelines and lead investigators for various components of this work. The challenges are great but we are confident that progress can be made.

Other work recently underway includes a project led by Joe Fleskes (USGS) to determine spring food habits of northern pintails and other waterfowl migrating through southern Oregon-northeastern California (SONEC) and measure densities of important food items in spring-flooded pasture and hay. The SONEC region of the Intermountain West is a critically important spring-staging area for northern pintails and other Pacific Flyway waterfowl. In late 2007, the PAG also initiated an update of pintail priority research and conservation needs. The results of this work will be an update of the 2003 document: *"The Northern Pintail in North America: The Problem and Prescription for Recovery."*

Several ongoing PAG initiatives are nearing comple-

tion. Ducks Unlimited Canada's Pintail Nesting Ecology Study, led by Jim Devries (DUC) and Karla Guyn (DUC), completed three years of field work in 2007 and data are currently being analyzed. This study was designed to test the response of pintails to habitat interventions promoted under Ducks Unlimited Canada's *Pintail Initiative* (i.e., spring-seeded crop conversion to fall-seeded crops, tame pasture, hayland). Results also will be used to update DUC's Pintail Productivity Model. Another study nearing completion is a comprehensive analysis of pintail banding and recovery data (1970–2003) undertaken by Mindy Rice (Texas Tech Univ.), David Haukos (USFWS), and Jim Dubovsky (USFWS). The results of this study will inform a continental banding strategy and contribute to development of adaptive management models for pintails.

More details and preliminary findings for the above studies can be found in the 2008 PAG newsletter (<http://www.siu.edu/~wildlife/PAG/About.asp>) and updates on all work will be provided at the PAG annual meeting, tentatively scheduled for October 14, 2008, in association with the fall NSST meeting at Saskatoon, Canada. For further information, contact Jim Devries, j_devries@ducks.ca.

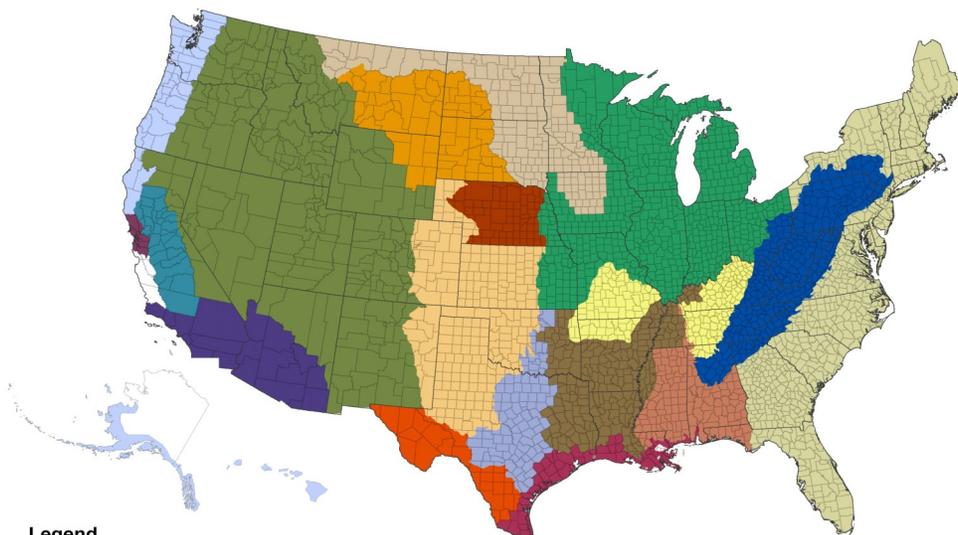


Jim Devries is a regional research biologist with Ducks Unlimited Canada and currently serves as Chair of the Pintail Action Group.





Joint Venture Maps



- Legend**
- County
 - Intermountain West Joint Venture
 - Rainwater Basin Joint Venture
 - Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture
 - Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture
 - Rio Grande Joint Venture
 - Atlantic Coast Joint Venture
 - Northern Great Plains Joint Venture
 - San Francisco Bay Joint Venture
 - Central Hardwoods Joint Venture
 - Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture
 - Sonoran Joint Venture
 - Central Valley Joint Venture
 - Pacific Coast Joint Venture
 - Upper Mississippi River/Great Lakes Region Joint Venture
 - East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture
 - Playa Lakes Joint Venture
 - Gulf Coast Joint Venture
 - Prairie Pothole Joint Venture





North American Waterfowl Management Plan

Science Support Team



The NAWMP Science Support Team's mission:

To help strengthen the biological foundations of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and facilitate continuous improvement of Plan conservation programs.