

North American Waterfowl Management Plan



SCIENCE SUPPORT TEAM

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Venturing Forward

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Summer 2009



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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- 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
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- Regional Population Abundance Objective Committee
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NSST Action Groups

- Pintail Action Group
(Jim DeVries, Chair)
- Scaup Action Team
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NAWMP and the Resilience of Waterfowl and Wetlands

By Paul Schmidt

On March 19, 2009, US Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar released the first ever comprehensive report on bird populations in the United States, showing that nearly a third of the nation’s 800 bird species are endangered, threatened, or in significant decline due to habitat loss, invasive species and other threats. At the same time, the report highlights examples, including for many species of waterfowl, where habitat restoration and conservation efforts have reversed previous declines, offering hope that it is not too late to take action to save declining populations. The report reveals convincing evidence that birds can respond quickly and positively to conservation action. The data show dramatic increases in many wetland birds such as pelicans, herons, egrets, osprey, and ducks, a testament to numerous cooperative conservation partnerships that have resulted in protection, enhancement and management of more than 30 million wetland acres.

Clearly, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan has made a difference in our continental efforts for waterfowl and wetland dependent species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service coordinated creation of the new report as part of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative, which includes partners from American Bird Conservancy, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Klamath Bird Observatory, National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Geological Survey. Data from various surveys such as the Waterfowl Breeding Pair Survey, Breeding Bird Survey, and Christmas Bird Count were analyzed in a new way to use birds as indicators of the health of the environment as measured in various habitat types such as coasts; arctic; boreal, eastern, western, and subtropical forests; wetlands; grasslands; aridlands; oceans; and islands. The full report and much more

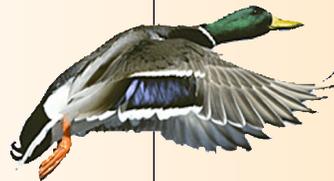
can be found on www.stateofthebirds.org



The report offers heartening evidence that strategic land management and conservation action can reverse declines in birds. Some summary messages regarding trends for waterfowl and wetlands are revealing.

Waterfowl: On the whole, 39 species of hunted waterfowl have increased by more than 100% during the past 40 years. Successful waterfowl conservation is a model for widespread habitat protection.

Wetlands: Although many wetland birds show troubling declines, conservation programs have protected millions of acres and contributed to thriving populations of hunted waterfowl, herons, egrets, and other birds. Lesser Scaup, Northern Pintail, and several sea ducks are showing troubling declines, but most geese are increasing dramatically and many ducks have held steady.



The team expects to produce reports under this manner of State of the Birds Report each year focusing on particular issues and geographies of note using these new analytical tools. Coordination with Canada and Mexico will continue and may evolve the geographic coverage of the report over time. The full report will be published every five years.

Paul Schmidt is Assistant Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service responsible for the Migratory Bird Programs 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.





NAWMP National Coordinator's Message

You might think there's not enough happening in the world of the NSST to fill a newsletter on a quarterly basis. That might be true on any given subject matter. However, in contrast I'd bet no one has seen the NSST more engaged in working towards "*Strengthening the Biological Foundations*" of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, on several fronts, in the past 20 years. More importantly, we are at the cusp of changing the paradigm of waterfowl management by attempting to marry three management streams. To wit, we are attempting to integrate waterfowl habitat, harvest and human dimensions. Other technical components of this effort entail:

- 1) Revising NAWMP continental population goals
- 2) Stepping down continental population abundance objectives to regions
- 3) Identifying specific vital rates linked to landscape attributes to be used as alternative performance metrics aggregated by annual cycle events
- 4) Developing a framework to assess/update upland & wetland net landscape change to inform regional-scale conservation planning and evaluate regional contributions to NAWMP goals

This is only a partial list. ...Sounds like plenty of fodder to write about to me. The email message containing this newsletter also includes a questionnaire requesting your responses for gauging your views on how useful this newsletter is to convey science to the waterfowl management community. It's simple, there is only one question and all you have to do is select the appropriate answer(s) as it reflects your views. Please take time to respond and send it back to me. Thanks.

George L. Coppen



BULLETIN BOARD

Meetings of Interest



**North American Duck Symposium
Toronto, Ontario
17 - 21 August 2009**



**North American Waterfowl Management Plan Committee Meeting
Calgary, AB
August 25 - 27, 2009**



**NSST Meeting
Calgary, AB
August 26 - 27, 2009**





Scoping the Technical Elements of the Plan Revision

By Jorge L. Coppen

By August 1, 2009, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP or Plan) Revision Steering Committee will have completed a “Plan Revision Scoping Report” to be rolled out at the Plan Committee’s next meeting. Now that the Plan Revision Steering Committee has laid out a vision for the Plan Revision itself, we can begin assessing the associated technical requirements to meet that vision.

The Plan Revision, slated for completion in May 2011 - the NAWMP’s 25th anniversary - will establish the development of a unified framework for waterfowl management objectives. It will also provide guidance to develop integrated decision frameworks served by integrated demographic models linked at multiple spatial scales in an adaptive management framework via shared monitoring and assessment programs.

Integrated decision & modeling frameworks will encompass a common foundation for harvest and habitat management that more explicitly accounts for consumptive (hunter)

and non-consumptive user values and preferences.

Under the direction of the Plan Revision Steering Committee, a technical subcommittee is working to identify the additional technical work and resources needed. This subcommittee consists of representatives from the NAWMP Science Support Team, the Adaptive Harvest Management Working Group, the Human Dimensions (HD) Working Group, and the Plan Revision Steering Committee.

NAWMP Revision Technical Work Assessment Workshop:

This technical subcommittee will meet in late June for a short workshop to provide necessary technical guidance to the Plan Revision Steering Committee.

The anticipated workshop outcomes represent just part of the broader scoping process to outline the purpose of the Plan Revision, the principles that will guide the Plan Revision, consultation processes for the Plan Revision, and communication needs and plans as the Plan Revision proceeds.

Technical subcommittee members charged with organizing the workshop and providing





technical feedback to the Plan Revision Steering Committee are Jorge Coppen (USFWS), Dale Humburg (DU), Mark Koneff (USFWS), and Mike Runge (USGS).

The technical subcommittee's workshop is slated for 29 June – 1 July 2009 at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD.

What will workshop attendees strive to achieve? A coordinated technical scoping effort for the Plan Revision is desired. The elements of this process should include:

- 1) Communications among the primary elements of a coherent framework (habitat, harvest, HD subgroups of the Plan Revision Steering Committee) to engage in developing a process that is systematic, transparent and well documented. The process must elicit explicit articulation of fundamental objectives and trade-offs among the individual elements.
- 2) These subgroups should consider utilizing a structured decision making workshop format conducted for respective individual elements of a coherent framework (habitat,

harvest, HD) with resultant multiple objectives analyses to follow. Integrated objectives must be evaluated via integrated models.

- 3) A description of what the Plan Revision should accomplish, to include how integration will be achieved. The Plan Revision must entail more than guidance to the process.

The NAWMP is a decision/guidance document and must provide a decision analysis that lays out optimal strategies for the waterfowl management community. The challenges for the Plan Revision were viewed as more conceptual than technical in nature, but at minimum, the Plan Revision should showcase coarse integrated models that assess trade-offs amongst the three management streams.



- 4) To showcase how we might move technical integration forward, and examine the feasibility of integration, we ultimately need to foster joint pursuit of case studies for key waterfowl species to better understand the challenges of developing integrated decision frameworks.

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

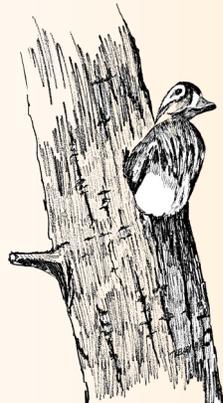




Joint Venture Implementation Plan Review Committee Quarterly Update
By Mike Brasher

No additional JV Implementation Plans have been submitted for Plan Committee endorsement; hence, the workload of the Implementation Plan Review Committee has been somewhat light since our last newsletter. However, we are presently assisting with USFWS reviews of the draft Oaks and Prairies JV and Rio Grande JV Implementation Plans. I extend special thanks to those folks that agreed to review these draft implementation plans.

In the most recent newsletter, we noted that an effort was afoot to develop a statement that effectively captures what is meant by 'Plan Committee endorsement' of a Joint Venture Implementation Plan. Indeed, Mike Johnson (USFWS) and Dave Smith (IWJV) led the work over the past two months to develop a draft statement to this effect, which was recently shared with and discussed by the Plan Committee. As a result of these discussions, the Plan Committee has requested certain clarifications and/or additions to the statement. This issue is scheduled for further consideration at the upcoming PC meeting in Calgary.



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



Assessing Habitat Gains & Losses

By Jorge L. Coppen

The NAWMP Continental Assessment interview teams surveyed Joint Ventures (JVs) to assess JV performance over the previous 20 years. One element of these interviews considered the level of accomplishment tracking with respect to habitat gains and losses. In their final report, the Continental Assessment Steering Committee expressed concern for "Better monitoring of key habitat trends such as extent of wetlands (all JVs), nesting habitat (breeding JVs), or foraging habitat (wintering JVs)."

They further emphasized that "Estimates of habitat gains and losses at landscape scales are essential to estimate true conservation progress and to set appropriate habitat objectives."

Accordingly, at our last meeting in October 2008, the NSST invited Tom Dahl of the USFWS Region 3 Wetlands Status & Trends office to discuss sampling intensification needs to produce JV/ecoregional estimates of wetland status and trends. The wetlands inventory represents a national scale inventory, so producing regional (JV) subsamples would likely result in imprecise data. To produce regional scale estimates, additional sample plots are needed to improve the inventory's precision.

NAWMP JVs were asked to complete an exercise, by January 23, 2009, to detect how wetland components of the landscape had changed since creation of NWI data. After JVs without current NWI data were serviced (i.e., provided with new mapping/digitizing), JV/ecoregions would be prioritized for remapping efforts based on: 1) waterfowl priority and 2) amount of landscape change (losses and gains).

The overarching goal of the Wetlands Status & Trends program is to produce statistically valid estimates of wetland area for states. Sample plots are stratified by physiographic regions (Hammond land surface forms) and the inventory includes 11 wetland categories.

The effort tracks all wetland gains & losses. The Wetlands Status & Trends inventory does not represent NWI mapping. It's about reinterpreting wetlands maps and the data is more current with higher accuracy (less classification details); It also includes uplands & "farmed" wetlands. Other useful features include updated documentation and protocols and automated data verification tools.



Primary advantages of using the Wetland Status & Trends inventory program include that it provides:

- a *measurable* element to gauge policy success
- a method grounded in *sound science*
- *Standardized* definitions and protocols
- reliance on “observables” that can be *verified* tools and *technologies are modern* and transferable

What are the advantages to JVs?

JVs could take advantage of scheduled national updates that would offer substantial cost and logistical savings.

Important considerations include employing probabilistic sampling. Sampling intensity needs to account for stratification within JVs for targeted wetland types & distribution and the desired level of classification detail. Possible study objectives include: Estimated total wetland area (status); Wetland area trends (t_1 to t_2); Estimated total area by wetland type (class); Estimated total wetland numbers (basin) and others parameters.

In the USA, we discussed the potential for the USFWS Wetland Status and Trends program to conduct a sampling intensification that would enable JVs to report on status and trends of wetlands at 5-10 year intervals. We also discussed a rotation of two JVs per year to get on a 10-year update rotation cycle. It would be useful to group JVs by estimated additional sampling needs to make this effort more manageable.

An important consideration is that reporting by BCRs within a JV would require more sample plots and thus involve higher costs. In order to estimate the number of sample plots needed across JVs to provide reliable estimates of change, we need to establish which JVs want to report estimates by major BCRs within their JV, rather than just JV-wide.



To get this effort underway, JVs need to provide Rex Johnson all current JV boundary shapefiles as soon as possible. This would allow a search of existing national plots, followed by a calculation of required sample plots. JVs could provide further study intensification objectives as this would help gauge intensity of sampling required and the time & effort that needs to be invested.



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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.