

**Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture  
Science Team Meeting Minutes  
6-7 December 2006, Omaha, NE**

**JV Technical Committee:** Present - John Castrale (IN DNR), John Coluccy (DU), Mike Eichholz (SIU), Bob Gates (OSU), Diane Granfors (FWS-HAPET), Dan Holm (IL DNR), Dave Luukkonen (MI DNR), Mike Roell (MO DNR), Greg Soulliere (FWS-JV), and Tom Will (FWS-MigBirds); Members absent - Dave Ewert (TNC)

**JV Ad hoc Subcommittee Members:** Present - Ron Gatti (WI DNR), Charlotte Neilson (SIU), Brad Potter (FWS-JV), Mark Shieldcastle (OH DNR), Wayne Thogmartin (USGS); Members absent - Pat Brown (MI NFI), Melinda Knutson (FWS-Refuges), Steve Lewis (FWS-MigBirds), Mike Monfils (MI NFI / MSU), and Bob Russell (FWS-MigBirds)

**Guest:** Tom Cooper (FWS-MigBirds)

**JV Science Team Meeting**

The full JV Science Team (Technical Committee and Ad hoc Subcommittee Members) met from 1:00 – 5:00 PM on 6 December and from 8:00 – 9:30 AM on 7 December to discuss the JV Implementation Plan and various administration topics. In addition, the Technical Committee (TC) met from 9:30 am to noon on 7 December to rank JV flex fund grant applications.

**Implementation Plan and Research Update**

Greg Soulliere reported the status of draft JV bird-group conservation strategies and all-bird plan:

1. Draft Waterbird Strategy sent to outside reviewers and JV Management Board in April 2006. Numerous comments were received and must be incorporated and strategy finalized. Waterbird Committee Members: Dan Holm (Chair), Robert Gates, Diane Granfors, Mike Monfils, Steve Lewis, Greg Soulliere, and Wayne Thogmartin.
2. Draft Waterfowl Strategy sent to outside reviewers and JV Management Board in June 2006. Review comments must still be incorporated and strategy finalized. Waterfowl Committee Members: John Coluccy and Greg Soulliere (Co-chairs), Pat Brown, Mike Eichholz, Ron Gatti, Dave Luukkonen, and Charlotte Nielsen.
3. Draft Shorebird Strategy sent to outside reviewers and JV Management Board in October 2006. Review comments must still be incorporated and strategy finalized. Shorebird Committee Members: Bob Gates (Chair), Dave Ewert, Diane Granfors, Brad Potter, Bob Russell, Mark Shieldcastle, and Greg Soulliere.
4. Draft Landbird Strategy sent to outside reviewers and JV Management Board on 12/1/06, with 1/15/07 deadline for comments.

Landbird Committee Members: Dave Ewert (Chair), John Castrale, Melinda Knutson, Brad Potter, Mike Roell, Greg Soulliere, Wayne Thogmartin, and Tom Will.

5. Draft JV All-bird Plan to be completed this winter and sent to JV Science Team for review by late March 2007.

Draft will be completed by Greg Soulliere and Brad Potter.

Brief research updates were provided by principle investigators for several JV funded projects, including Spring Migration Conservation Planning (Mike E. and Bob G.; SIU, OSU, DU), Nutrient Reserve Dynamics (Mike E.; SIU, DU), Passive vs. Active Wetland Management (Mike E., SIU), Cavity Nest-site Availability (Charlotte N., SIU), Translating Population Objectives Into Habitat Objectives (Wayne T., USGS), and Factors Limiting Blue-winged Teal (Ron G., WI DNR).

### **NAWMP Assessment**

The recently completed draft North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) assessment was reviewed by Charlotte Neilson. Key points included: 1) Some wintering JV regions have reached their habitat objectives, 2) Advances have been made on breeding areas, but if CRP was lost, duck populations would likely decline significantly, 3) The assessment team suggested breeding areas need more emphasis, 4) JVs have had various degrees of success linking population and habitat objectives (they must do better), 5) Some federal land-use programs and policy are not directly related and even conflict, 6) Older JVs generally have stronger planning products, 7) Most JVs can not estimate what has been lost while they have been creating new habitat (no measure of net change), 8) Most JVs are trying to prioritize evaluation and monitoring to better determine net impact, 9) Global climate change is not incorporated into JV plans, 10) Most JVs spend >75% of funding on waterfowl, 11) Only one JV measured success with vital rates, and no increase was obvious, 12) JVs should test models and assumptions, update plans, and better communicate with associated JVs, Flyways, and other stakeholders, 13) Greater communication is needed by JVs, NAWMP Planning Committee, North American Wetlands Council, and others, 14) Overall, it is difficult to evaluate effect of landscape change due to NAWMP, but the plan remains a great long-term success.

Barb Pardo mentioned the draft assessment was well done, but contained some errors. "Breeding habitat" equated to the Prairie Pothole Region; there was no recognition of our JV region as a breeding area. The draft assessment referred to the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant program being controlled by NAWMP, but it is not. Refocusing JV efforts on waterfowl was also suggested in the assessment, but all-bird conservation is a directive from Congress. A JV-specific assessment will eventually be provided to coordinators by the NAWMP Assessment Team.

### **All-bird Habitat Recommendations (JV Plan)**

Bob Gates and Brad Potter lead a discussion on how we might approach JV all-bird habitat recommendations using objectives from our four JV bird-group strategies. Of the

two approaches we discussed, summing all bird-group needs or using a maximum need (substitution) approach, the later was supported by the Science Team. Brad also discussed the breakdown of habitat “maintenance” objectives, to accommodate current populations, and “restoration” objectives, to eliminate population deficits and achieve target populations. Using the JV focal species with maximum habitat area need for each cover type within each State\*BCR polygon (23 total in JV region) seems the best approach.

Wayne Thogmartin suggested the need to consider what cover types are being removed / replaced in the accounting scheme of an all-bird plan. Tom mentioned that we must realize “doubling” populations is not likely for some species even though that may be the goal in a continental plan. Population and habitat targets for some species seem unrealistically high, but we decided to keep them in the plan for now because they are the best we have. Cost estimates to complete plan implementation will be attempted in the all-bird plan. Overlaying (electronically) the bird-group decision support maps is not going to be possible. A LINK (USGS program) type map might serve to merge bird-group priority areas, but maps should suggest no more resolution than what we have biological information to support. If state managers want more detail, we can help them, but habitat decisions are up to local managers as the JV plan and decision support tools are not intended to be site specific.

### **Technical Committee Transition**

Mike Eichholz coordinated discussion on how we might operate as a Technical Committee (TC) in the future, post JV plan completion. We are approaching a juncture in JV planning and research / monitoring prioritization. Monitoring and evaluation is a growing priority for our JV and an essential part of adaptive planning and management. The committee agreed this aspect of planning must be enhanced and suggested completing an annual summary of projects (like PPJV) for both outreach and in-reach purposes. We discussed the potential of replacing our bird-group subcommittees with monitoring and evaluation committees, but we decided that monitoring needs are different and bird-group committees should be retained. When similar methodologies are used, committees can combine efforts. In addition, we discussed the need to meet as a larger group periodically to share research and monitoring information with the Management Board and other key stakeholders.

**Action item:** Bird-group subcommittee chairs (John, Bob, Dan, and Dave) will further consider feasibility / value of retaining their sub-committees and also identify potential future members (i.e., existing members, other JV technical committee folks, or additional ad hoc members) and provide that list to Greg. Chairs should consider having at least one JV staff person (Barb, Paul, Greg, and Brad) as a co-chair for additional support.

Regarding JV flex-fund proposals, some members feel uncomfortable reviewing proposals for species outside their area of expertise. We discussed having bird-group subcommittees prioritize proposals specific to their bird group, and then the whole TC could rank proposals on scientific merit. Moreover, we should better identify in the RFP

the specific research and monitoring needs identified in the new JV Implementation Plan. Remember, however, that RFPs must be posted on a government web site so length and complexity may be a concern.

### **Management Board Workshop**

JV Staff have had some concern about Management Board interest and support for the revised JV Implementation Plan. We do not want Board members to see the draft all-bird plan “cold,” without an explanation (and opportunity for feedback) on how pooled bird habitat objectives were developed. We need to have Board engagement before final habitat objectives are set. For the 1998 JV (waterfowl) plan, breeding habitat objectives were developed by Management Board members and individual state plans were rolled up into JV pooled objectives. We used a different approach this time, with the TC composing the plan and with greater emphasis on developing a scientific process. A meeting between the Management Board and TC would be helpful for information sharing on both the all-bird plan and on recent research supported by flex-fund monies.

TC members preferred the idea of a spring meeting (e.g., May) with the Management Board to get early feedback on the all-bird strategy, plus conduct research presentations. Meeting location should be near a major airport for convenient travel, potentially Minneapolis (Board members can determine). The August Management Board meeting (Bemidji, MN) will provide another opportunity for a workshop with Board and TC members.

**Action item:** Barb Pardo will contact JV Management Board members to evaluate interest and dates for a joint workshop with the Technical Committee. The focus will be on the JV Implementation Plan and JV sponsored research projects.

### **Monitoring and Other Conservation Planning Initiatives**

John Castrale reviewed the draft North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) monitoring document. The plan suggests need for a better link between monitoring and management actions. The JV may be in a situation to implement portions of this plan when finalized. A recent Northeast Monitoring Workshop (see attached proceedings or [www.nebirdmonitor.org/workshops](http://www.nebirdmonitor.org/workshops)) may provide a useful framework to review. We discussed using the NABCI document and NE workshop results to develop a JV regional monitoring framework at the spring meeting.

**Action item:** Greg Soulliere will provide bird-group subcommittee chairs with lists of monitoring and research needs from each of the bird-group strategies. Chairs may gain insight from reviewing lists from other bird groups. Chairs (Dave, Dan, Bob, and John) must be prepared to work with their subcommittee at the spring meeting to prioritize research and monitoring needs for their bird group and then the Science Team can evaluate the pooled list for all groups.

Tom Will reviewed the recent Radar Ornithology Workshop held in Albuquerque. The bird management community must identify explicit questions to be answered so radar specialists can respond; the technology is expected to grow in the next 10 years with some tools able to discriminate bird groups by wing beat. However, it may take a combination of techniques to achieve necessary resolution to distinguish species. There is an overwhelming amount of data when working with NEXRAD. Whereas meteorologists attempt to get rid of the noise (often birds), these are the user end products the biological community wants. In particular, the JV might be able to use the length and timing of migration and use of stopover sites, but large flocks are needed to differentiate groups coming and going.

Tom Cooper provided information on the King Rail and Henslow's Sparrow assessments and the recent King Rail workshop (see attached King Rail Conservation Plan). Greg Soulliere provided an update on the Upper Mississippi Valley / Great Lakes Waterbird Plan, which describes status, trends, and threats of breeding waterbirds in this region.

### **Administration**

Barb Pardo reviewed some of the TC bylaws and discussed member terms and rotation / renewal. Barb felt the TC should remain a 10-member team with the use of ad hoc members as needed. There have been some nominations for new members. Mike Eichholz, an original member, mentioned that he would like to step down from the TC but remain involved with the waterfowl subcommittee as an ad hoc member. Barb will send a note to the Management Board requesting recommendations for renewal of existing members, plus nominations for new TC members.

We discussed the current request for proposals (RFP) used for the JV flex-fund grant program. The RFP may need to be revised to better reflect specific objectives and needs in the new JV Plan (e.g., focal species limiting factors). In addition, the RFP includes Outreach, but no detail about JV outreach priorities. For example, support of state Bird Conservation Initiatives (BCIs) and initial JV funding assistance for a BCI coordinator is generally believed to be valuable, but it is not mentioned in the RFP.

**Action item:** Barb Pardo will request guidance from the Management Board on a potential Information and Outreach program for the JV which will help in determining priority for JV staff and future funding support.

### **Next Technical Committee Meeting**

An early spring Science Team meeting is needed to discuss the draft JV all-bird plan, following feedback on the plan at the March Management Board meeting. We also need to prioritize JV bird monitoring, evaluation, and research identified in the implementation plan (by bird-group and collectively). The dates of 12-13 April seemed to fit most schedules, with 11 April serving as a travel day. A location for this meeting was not determined, but East Lansing worked well for our last spring Science Team meeting (2005), and recent feedback has been positive for this location.

### **JV Technical Committee / Grant Proposal Review Meeting**

The JV Office received 13 flex-fund grant applications that met criteria listed in the 2007 request for proposals (RFP). In early November, technical committee members were mailed the following: 1) hard copies of each flex-fund grant application, 2) a spreadsheet listing the titles, cost, and duration of each project, and 3) a copy of the 2007 flex fund RFP. TC members were asked to refer to the RFP for application criteria and stated JV priorities before ranking projects high (1), medium (2), and low (3). They were also sent an electronic copy of the spreadsheet and asked to fill in their project scores and return the spreadsheet to Greg Soulliere by 22 November. Individual scores were pooled to generate a mean score for each project, which was used as a starting point for discussion at the 7 December TC meeting.

Participants at the TC meeting were informed of the approximate amount of JV funding likely to be available (~\$80,000). Four projects were rated high priority based on the survey of members (see attached flex fund spreadsheet): *Enhancing breeding waterfowl survey in MI and WI* (\$15,308), *Foraging ecology for shorebirds* (\$32,647 x 2 years), *Great Lakes waterbird survey* (\$11,500), and *the Ohio NWI update* (\$52,408). With little debate, these four projects were endorsed by the TC. Barb Pardo had already discussed the Ohio NWI cost with the applicant and she suggested a reduced rate of funding (\$20,000) so not to exceed available funds. The TC thought this was a reasonable approach and endorsed Barb's suggestion.

The meeting was adjourned at noon.