

Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Science Team Meeting Minutes (May 2009)

The Joint Venture Science Team met 12 May at the Potawatomi Inn at the Pokagon State Park in Angola, IN. The Science Team consists of the JV Technical Committee, plus ad-hoc subcommittee members with bird conservation expertise. Following the JV Science Team meeting, a 2-day Coordinated Bird Monitoring workshop was held, which included science team members and additional bird conservation partners from Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. These minutes review only the JV Science Team meeting.

Technical Committee members present: John Castrale (IN DNR), John Coluccy (DU), Dave Ewert (TNC), Dave Luukkonen (MI DNR), and Greg Soulliere (FWS-JV).
Members absent: Todd Bishop (IO DNR), Bob Gates (OSU), Ron Gatti (WI DNR), Dan Holm (IL DNR), Mike Roell (MO DNR), and Wayne Thogmartin (USGS).

Ad hoc Bird-group Subcommittee members present: John Curnutt (for Bill Bartush, USFS), Katie Koch (FWS-MB), Steve Lewis (FWS-MB), Mike Monfils (MI NFI / MSU), Brad Potter (FWS-JV), and Tom Will (FWS-MB). **Members absent:** Mike Eichholz (SIU), Melinda Knutson (FWS-Refuges), Charlotte Roy (MN DNR), and Bob Russell (FWS-MB).

Following introductions, Brad Potter reviewed progress on his work developing reports describing apparent discrepancies in JV bird habitat objectives and landscape cover types for each of the JV region's state x BCR polygons ($n = 22$). He provided a thorough explanation and 7-page draft account describing details of Indiana x BCR 22. In addition to bird habitat objectives and current cover types (based on National Land Cover Data - NLCD), the account suggests sources of error and "what it means to be above or below habitat objectives to maintain desired populations." Brad asked Science Team members to review the sample account and provide feedback on the usefulness of this tool and necessary additions or deletions.

We discussed the potential of using these detailed state x BCR accounts to develop scaled-down versions of the JV Implementation Plan for partners interested in smaller scale planning, as well as aiding JV staff assessing NAWCA grant applications (i.e., which grants proposals best address JV bird habitat priorities). Likewise, this information may be useful for decision optimization, a process being refined for bird conservation by Wayne Thogmartin and others. Wayne is developing an optimization decision-support system, which may be used to partition the landscape in order to reach population objectives for priority birds by emphasizing management for a specific bird group where the land has "equivocal value." In other words, the system can steer field biologists deciding how to manage individual landscapes while attempting to achieve regional bird population objectives for multiple species, collectively.

Finally, the JV Science Team also discussed problems related to planning from the “top down” (i.e., stepping down continental objectives), which is the current technique used in JV planning and the likely cause for many of the “bird habitat discrepancies.” A better understanding of available cover types via state x BCR polygon assessment can assist in bird conservation planning from the “bottom-up,” improving decisions regarding bird-habitat relationships across our very large and diverse region.

Action item: By 29 June, all Science Team members should review the draft Indiana x BCR 22 account (will be sent in future correspondence) and provide Brad feedback, particularly regarding how this tool may be improved for use by the science team (e.g., improved planning) and perhaps state and local field biologists.

Greg Soulliere reviewed development of current lists of JV research and monitoring priorities (i.e., via JV planning process) and explained the need to update list status and prioritize these evaluation needs. He provided a draft matrix with research objectives from each of the JV bird-group strategies and another with monitoring objectives from each plan. The team then separated into bird-group subcommittees and attempted to fill empty cells in each matrix with recommendations to achieve objective accomplishment. Subcommittees discussed the status of recent/current projects addressing bird-group strategy objectives, and they identified additional projects needed to test JV planning assumptions and fill information gaps. Finally, the bird-group subcommittees prioritized research and monitoring objectives, and chairs presented discussion results to the full Science Team at the end of the day. Completed draft matrices with objectives prioritized and potential projects are attached for your review. Final versions of these lists will be placed on the JV website and will be used to help direct use of JV flex funds for research and monitoring.

Action item: Science Team members should review the draft research and monitoring priority lists (matrices) and provide additional information or suggestions for improvement to Greg Soulliere by 22 June.

Action item: Greg Soulliere will provide the revised matrices to JV Coordinator Barb Pardo for review and request they be used to replace the current research and monitoring priority lists on the JV website. This information will also be provided to the JV Management Board at their 14 July meeting in St. Clair Michigan.

Our meeting began at 9:00 AM and adjourned at 5:00 PM.