



Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture
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Stakeholder input for revision of the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Landbird Habitat Conservation Strategy

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture (JV), which includes natural resource agencies and organizations from 10 Midwestern states (Figure 1), is dedicated to advancing integrated bird conservation across all bird groups. The JV partnership has increasingly focused on developing regional conservation plans and implementing strategic bird habitat delivery since its inception. Current JV planning documents include regional- and state-scale bird population and habitat goals “stepped down” from continental bird conservation plans. This approach was used to assure linkage between continental and regional conservation plans and to facilitate complementary project implementation across jurisdictions. Working toward common regional migratory bird goals helps the JV partnership increase efficiency and effectiveness in bird habitat delivery to meet objectives for priority species (UMRGLR JV 2007).

During 2005 – 2007, scientists from across the JV region (the JV Science Team) collaborated to develop “Habitat Conservation Strategies” for each of the primary bird groups – waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, and landbirds (see UpperMissGreatLakes.org). Completion of



Figure 1. Boundary of the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Joint Venture Region, including Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs).

research and monitoring projects since 2007 has resulted in new information to refine these JV bird-group strategies. This information and new priorities related to human dimensions, especially for waterfowl conservation (NAWMP 2012), and updates from Partners in Flight (PIF) has set in motion the revision of JV strategies and ultimately adjustments in JV bird population and habitat objectives.

Currently, the JV Waterfowl and Waterbird Habitat Conservation Strategies are being updated. As the JV Landbird Committee considered revision of the JV Landbird Habitat Conservation Strategy (Potter et al. 2007; hereafter 2007 Landbird Strategy), members recommended use of a survey to determine priority information needs of those implementing landbird habitat conservation in the JV region. Thus, we developed a questionnaire to survey key stakeholders and determine their understanding and use of the 2007 Landbird Strategy, plus determine additional information needs that should be incorporated into a revised Landbird Strategy.

STUDY DESIGN AND CONSIDERATIONS

The questionnaire survey (Appendix A) included nine multiple-choice questions regarding the 2007 Landbird Strategy, general landbird planning, and related bird habitat management issues. Additional questions to determine survey-respondent roles within stakeholder organizations, stakeholder geography, and a text box providing opportunity for “additional feedback” were also included. The questionnaire was designed to be completed in <10 minutes using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

Requests to complete the survey were sent to 57 potential stakeholders identified by members of the JV Science Team, focusing on decision makers in landbird conservation in each JV state. Thus, the survey was not intended to be representative of all possible users of the 2007 Landbird Strategy but rather to target program leaders and regional habitat planners. Stakeholders surveyed were comprised of state (Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska), federal (U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture), and non-government organizations (NGOs; The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society). The request was emailed with a cover letter and links to the 2007 Landbird Strategy and to the survey questionnaire.

The request and cover letter came from the JV Landbird Committee Chair, Dave Ewert, and JV Science Coordinator, Greg Soulliere. The primary message in the email was, “On behalf of the JV Science Team, the JV Landbird Committee requests you complete the short survey (link below). We will use results from this assessment to redesign and improve the JV Landbird Strategy to better meet your conservation planning needs for landbirds.” Duration of the survey period was three weeks, 12 September – 3 October 2014.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sixteen participants (28% response rate) completed the survey. Respondents included individuals from each of the 10 states in the JV region. All 16 respondents were aware of the JV partnership. The majority of respondents (75%) had read or referenced the 2007 Landbird Strategy and most indicated they had used the 2007 Landbird Strategy in some form as a decision-support tool (Table 1). Non-response bias was not evaluated, and responses may not be representative of all key-decision makers surveyed. We suspect respondents were likely biased towards individuals who have used the 2007 Landbird Strategy, and non-respondents were less likely to be familiar with the strategy.

Table 1. Questions and responses to a survey administered to federal, state, and NGO stakeholders within the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Joint Venture (JV) region. The September 2014 survey was conducted to collect information regarding how the 2007 JV Landbird Strategy has been used and how it can be improved in a future revision.

Survey Question (abbreviated)	Survey Response
JV Landbird Strategy	
Read or referenced the strategy?	Yes (12); No (4)
JV Plan used as a decision-support tool?	Always (0); Sometimes (14); Never (2)
Most useful plan feature (in order of importance)?	1) Focal species (10) 2) Spatial areas to target conservation (9) 3) Setting population/habitat objectives (8) 4) Identifying habitat threats (8) 5) Identifying research needs (7)
Other Landbird Documents	
Other documents used?	State Wildlife Action Plans, statewide bird management plans, species-specific plans (e.g., Bobwhite Plan), NABCI and PIF plans, TNC ecoregional plans, federal and state forest plans
Regional population/habitat objectives addressed?	Yes (4); No (5)

Survey respondents indicated the most valuable sections of the 2007 Landbird Strategy were designation and emphasis on “focal species” to represent specific cover types on the landscape and the identification of spatial areas (i.e., via decision-support maps) to target habitat conservation delivery for species suites (e.g., grassland birds).

Ten respondents (six did not answer this question) indicated their agencies also used other landbird documents for conservation planning. Listed examples included State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs), species-specific plans, NGO-ecoregional plans, and North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) and PIF planning documents. Respondents indicated these alternative landbird planning documents identified priority conservation areas for birds using several different metrics, such as focal or priority species, focal habitat, breeding, migration and

or wintering habitat, vulnerable or sensitive habitat, and or species type (e.g., game or threatened/endangered species). Four of nine responses indicated these other (non-JV) landbird documents addressed regional-scale population and habitat objectives for landbirds.

The majority of survey respondents (69%) indicated they would be more inclined to conduct habitat conservation for nongame landbird species if recommended habitat actions also positively influenced game species. Since conservation dollars are often earmarked for management targeted at game species, agencies might have a greater influence on nongame bird populations when habitat factors limiting game and nongame species are considered simultaneously and integrated in management efforts. However, other respondents indicated that “species of greatest conservation need” (SGCN) would be unlikely to benefit from game species management since game species tend to be generalists. Some individuals suggested a need to improve how we address the requirements of SGCNs within a larger comprehensive approach.

Survey respondents identified several information needs in the open-ended feedback request at the end of the survey (Appendix A). They primarily indicated areas not adequately addressed in the 2007 Landbird Strategy as well as ways to improve a future version. Recommendations included:

- 1) Create explicit links between the bird group plans and species-specific plans (e.g., Bobwhite Plan) to ensure habitat objectives and target areas align and are strategic across all plans.
- 2) Provide access to GIS layers and models found within JV Strategies. These layers can be used with local data layers (e.g., ownership and other ongoing projects) to improve statewide planning efforts.
- 3) Set specific area (acre) and distribution objectives for conservation lands to help assure maintenance of landscapes that meet regional/sub-regional population goals through improved coordination in land acquisition, regional connectivity, and overlap with objectives for other bird groups.
- 4) Standardize criteria, and thus selection of priority species, for the Birds of Conservation Concern list (across FWS and JV region) so regional priorities can be easily stepped down to the state level.
- 5) Downscale population goals and habitat objectives in a manner more applicable to local biologists or state planners. The goals and decision tools are too broad (or general) to be useful in day-to-day habitat work or planning. Additionally, habitat objectives could be defined for specific important geopolitical areas (e.g., public lands in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan).

- 6) Develop a set of objectives to guide regional bird habitat connectivity planning. A process that urges regional cooperation and a common framework should be encouraged within an updated strategy.
- 7) Ensure goals and objectives address only areas found within the JV regional boundary.
- 8) Provide updates on species habitat requirements.
- 9) Provide all strategy tables in pdf and excel format for easier integration into other planning documents.

Results of this survey will be used to inform a revision of the JV Landbird Habitat Conservation Strategy to better meet the needs of stakeholders. Although we were unable to collect recommendations from the full survey pool of landbird decision makers in the JV region, input received by responding stakeholders provided valuable direction from partners likely to use a revised JV Landbird Strategy. Thus, this survey effort was helpful to the Landbird Committee as they begin organizing a process for JV Landbird Strategy revision.

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LITERATURE CITED

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Appendix A. Survey of Possible Users of the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture (JV) Landbird Habitat Conservation Strategy

During 2005 - 2007 scientists from across the 10-state JV region (the JV Science Team) completed "Habitat Conservation Strategies" for each of the primary bird groups – waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds and landbirds. Completion of research and monitoring projects since 2007 has resulted in new information to refine JV bird-group strategies. As we consider revision of the JV Landbird Habitat Conservation Strategy ([Landbird Plan](#)), we would like to better understand the needs of potential users of this document for landbird conservation.

Please answer the following questions and use the comment section below to provide additional feedback. This survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

1. Have you heard of the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Have you read or referenced at least portions of the 2007 JV Landbird Habitat Conservation Strategy?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Does your organization use the 2007 JV Landbird Strategy as a decision-support tool, particularly as an aid for bird habitat conservation?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
4. If so, what aspects of the 2007 JV Landbird Strategy are most useful to your organization (circle as many as apply)?
 - a. Setting population or habitat objectives
 - b. JV focal species (representing cover types and bird guilds)
 - c. Identifying research needs
 - d. Identifying population / habitat threats
 - e. Identifying spatial areas to target conservation actions
 - f. Other, please identify

5. If your organization does not use the 2007 JV Landbird Strategy, is there another guidance document or landbird plan that your organization does use?
 - a. Yes, please identify
 - b. No
6. Does this non-JV plan address regional-scale population and habitat objectives for landbirds?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Are there information needs not addressed in the 2007 JV Landbird Strategy (or non-JV landbird plan currently being used by your organization) that you would find beneficial to making habitat conservation decisions?
 - a. Please identify
8. How does the plan currently being used by your organization identify priority conservation areas for birds (circle all that apply)?
 - a. Focal species representing a suite of species (i.e., “umbrella” or “surrogate” species)
 - b. Focal habitat types (i.e., prairie, forest, wetland, etc.)
 - c. Vulnerable or sensitive habitats (climate change sensitive, disturbance-sensitive, disturbance-dependent)
 - d. Game species
 - e. Threatened and endangered species
 - f. Partners in Flight (PIF) priority species
 - g. Breeding habitats
 - h. Migration habitats
 - i. Wintering habitats
 - j. Connectivity of the landscape (e.g. corridors, barriers, fragmentation or patch size considerations)
 - k. Other, please identify
9. Habitat management for game species can benefit non-game birds. For example, management for Wild Turkey can benefit Red-headed Woodpecker and management for Woodcock can benefit Golden-winged Warbler. Would your organization be more or less inclined to conduct

habitat conservation for non-game landbird species when those habitat activities are tied to game species management?

- a. More inclined to manage for non-game birds when associated with game species.
 - b. Prefer to focus on game species only and not associate habitat management decisions between game and non-game species.
 - c. Prefer to focus on non-game species only and not associate habitat management decisions between game and non-game species.
 - d. No difference in management priority between game and non-game species.
10. Please circle the description below most closely aligning with your role in your organization.
- a. Administration (e.g., program leader / supervisor)
 - b. Regional wildlife-habitat planning (e.g., conservation planner / ecologist)
 - c. Wildlife habitat implementation (e.g., field biologist / technician)
11. Please identify the State(s) where you administer, plan, and or implement bird habitat conservation.

Please provide additional feedback to help improve the usefulness of a revised JV Landbird Habitat Conservation Strategy or other JV bird conservation planning tools.