

JV Science Team Meeting Minutes
Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture
Technical Committee and Ad hoc Bird-group Committees
12 May 2010 Conference Call

Technical Committee members participating: Dave Ewert (TNC), Bob Gates (OSU), Dan Holm (IL DNR), Dave Luukkonen (MI DNR), Mark Nelson (USFS), Mike Roell (MO DOC), Greg Soulliere (FWS-JV), Wayne Thogmartin (USGS); Absent – John Coluccy (DU) and Ron Gatti (WI DNR).

Ad hoc Bird-group Committee members participating: Bill Bartush (USFS), Tom Copper (FWS-MB), Melinda Knutson (FWS-Refuges), Katie Koch (FWS-MB), Steve Lewis (FWS-MB), Brad Potter (FWS-JV), Charlotte Roy (MN DNR), Bob Russell (FWS-MB), Megan Seymour (FWS-ES), Josh Stafford (INHS), Tom Will (FWS-MB); Absent - Mike Eichholz (SIU) and Mike Monfils (MI NFI).

Visitors participating: Robb Macleod (DU) and Barb Pardo (UMRGLR JV).

Meeting began at 9:00 Eastern, 8:00 Central

Monitoring: Following introductions, Katie Koch provided a very thorough review of monitoring initiatives across the JV region. Highlights comprised 1) a new Region 3 interactive website including six working groups for priority bird guilds (e.g., nocturnal, grassland, Great Lakes coastal), 2) a new “data node” coordinated through the Midwest Avian Data Center (via contract with Pt. Reyes Bird Observatory), and 3) several Region 3 survey efforts -- new (Secretive Marsh Bird and Nightjar), expanded (BBS vacant routes filled), and proposed (Lake Michigan Diving Ducks and Pelagic Birds) -- to help address monitoring priorities identified in the 2007 JV Implementation Plan. Katie also noted two Coordinated Bird Monitoring workshops to be held in August and September, following a format similar to previous CBM workshops (meeting objectives and locations to be announced in early summer).

Melinda Knutson reviewed the new Integrated Waterbird Management and Monitoring (IWMM) Initiative, which aspires to improve understanding and management of migrating and wintering waterbirds following an SHC approach (2 handouts were provided). SHC, or Strategic Habitat Conservation, better integrates management and monitoring – requiring explicit management objectives, monitoring populations and habitats to measure conservation effect, and use of monitoring data to adjust management approaches to increase effectiveness. The IWMM initiative will operate at three spatial scales: Flyway (Mississippi and Atlantic), region, and local. Most bird conservation partners have heard about the project through workshops, Flyway meetings, or information leaflets. The initiative is now forming bird-group teams to develop system models and monitoring protocols. Protocols will be tested with a pilot study in fall 2010 and Flyway-scale monitoring is targeted to begin in spring 2011. A post doc (Andy Wilson) was hired to spearhead project coordination, and he will be located at Patuxent.

Action item: Melinda is soliciting information regarding existing waterbird monitoring protocols used by state agencies. Please contact Melinda if you are aware of a sound survey protocol for non-breeding waterbirds.

NWI: Updating the 20-30 year old National Wetland Inventory across the JV region was identified as one of our highest information needs when developing the 2007 JV Implementation Plan. Staff members at the Ducks Unlimited Great Lakes Office have been completing some of this revision work and Robb Macleod provided an update. At this time, the states of MI, OH, IN, and IL have been completed using 2005 photos, but updates are still in draft form. Brian Huberty (Region 3 NWI Office) is coordinating quality control, and finalized updates will be posted on the NWI website. Robb is also using the new information to conduct a trend analysis for three time periods (1970s, 90s, and 2005), which has been completed for OH and IL and is almost complete for MI. Regarding other JV states (non-DU NWI projects), most of the update work has been completed for IA, but additional funding is required before the contractor releases the information. The state of MN is beginning an NWI update with a completion target of 2016, and WI has been completing a few counties / year but this may be accelerated with a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant if approved. We are unaware of any NWI update activity in MO, NE, or KS.

Wind Energy: Megan Seymour reviewed the strong interest in shifting economies to renewable energy especially wind energy in the Great Lakes region. Land-based wind turbine placement has no federal oversight and state agencies are attempting to better understand the influence of wind energy on wildlife, particularly migratory birds and bats. Off-shore projects are desirable to wind developers and these locations will be federally regulated. The FWS and state wildlife agencies are struggling to develop science-based guidelines to improve sighting decisions. Current focus is to determine locations of primary migration corridors, degree of bird/bat use and species composition, and height of migration relative to potential rotor sweep. Two radar units have been purchased with GLRI funds to help in this assessment, but the long-term goal is to develop decision support maps similar to those appearing in the JV Implementation Plan. Also, a request for proposals (RFP) may soon be announced for bird surveys on Great Lakes islands (likely wind energy target areas), but this will depend on funding.

BCR Boundaries: Brad Potter provided an explanation and accompanying Power Point presentation for potential BCR boundary adjustments within our JV region, adding agriculturally-dominated clay lake plains around Saginaw Bay and western Lake Erie to BCR 23 (Prairie Hardwood Transition). There was general agreement during the Science Team conference call, so following our meeting Brad sent this note to Debbie Hahn (AFWA NABCI Committee) seeking guidance:

The Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Technical Committee and Science Team recently discussed potential changes to Bird Conservation Region (BCR) boundaries. Following the intent of BCRs, these changes would logically place the Lake Huron and Erie Plains within the Prairie Hardwood Transition BCR (23) and remove them from the Boreal Hardwood Transition (12) and Eastern Tallgrass Prairie (22), respectively. Historically both of these clay lake plains were dominated by forested wetlands (swamp). The Lake Huron Plain may have been well placed into Boreal Hardwood Transition before European settlement because it was heavily forested. However, the sub-region was converted to agriculture in the early 1900s and it will likely remain in crop production due to the high productivity of the soils. In addition to forested wetlands, the Lake Erie Plain historically included interspersed pockets of savanna pre-1900s. This area is also now heavily influenced by agriculture due to its productive soils. Currently both these sub-regions provide high value to breeding and non-breeding waterfowl, waterbirds, and shorebirds, thus conservation actions in these regions are focused on emergent (non-forested) wetland protection, restoration, and management. These actions are more indicative of conservation planning, design, and implementation for the Prairie Hardwood Transition. Changing the Prairie Hardwood Transition BCR boundary to encompass these two

lake plain areas would allow for easier descriptions of priority bird needs and more logical conservation planning in all the BCRs influenced.

The NABCI website describes "...the map (BCRs) is a dynamic tool..." and "...BCR boundaries will change as new scientific information becomes available." Could you assist me by describing the process for making changes to BCR boundaries?

Action item: Brad will provide an update to the Science Team once a response is received from Debbie Hahn. If the process for BCR boundary adjustment seems manageable, JV Science Office staff will request endorsement from the JV Management Board at the August 2010 meeting.

LCCs and JV Board: Barb Pardo reviewed events from the March JV Management Board meeting, plus updated us on bird habitat project funding through the GLRI; 2010 project proposals were reviewed by JV Staff and selections were recently submitted for approval. The GLRI also resulted in elevated NAWCA funding available in 2010 for projects within the Great Lakes basin. Barb covered progress on the new Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) as well as the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie LCC to be "stood up" in 2011. A Steering Committee and Technical Committee are being established for the UMGL LCC, and Greg Soulliere will represent the JV on the Technical Committee (*note:* following our meeting, John Coluccy volunteered to represent DU on this same committee). Finally, Barb mentioned the upcoming August JV Management Board meeting. One full day of this meeting will be dedicated to identifying and discussing JV partner obstacles to bird habitat delivery (i.e., barriers to implementing conservation objectives identified in the 2007 JV Plan).

Various Topics: We ended our meeting with group dialogue regarding sundry matters. First, some Science Team members have suggested we transition our Bird-group Committees into other themes, such as bird habitat implementation or system (e.g., wetland, grassland) foci. One suggestion included retaining the bird-group committees but establishing subcommittees when a specific task is identified. For example, we discussed subcommittees to support state Bird Conservation Initiatives and to prepare for our JV triennial assessment by the NAWMP Committee in summer 2011. The group generally felt we should seek guidance from our JV Management Board on the Science Team committee question, to assure any committee re-alignment best meets their needs. Also, we will increase the frequency of Science Team conference calls as required to address specific issues. Finally, Barb reviewed progress filling the vacant JV assistant coordinator and GIS technician positions, a process that should be complete by mid to late summer.

Action item: Bob and Charlotte will assist Greg preparing information for the science portion of the 2011 NAWMP triennial assessment. Members of this Science Team "NAWMP Assessment Subcommittee" quickly also volunteered the help of John Coluccy and Mike Eichholz who were unavailable for today's call and thus unable to rebuff the tender of their services.

Meeting concluded at noon Eastern, 11:00 Central