UPPER MISSISSIPPI / GREAT LAKES JOINT VENTURE

JV Technical Committee Summer 2022 Meeting Minutes

Compiled by Greg Soulliere, JV Science Coordinator

Our JV Technical Committee (TC) completed a virtual meeting on 4 August 2022, with preparation by all TC members leading up to the meeting. There were four agenda items:

1. Develop JV funding recommendations for 2022 research proposals (JV-MB NOFO).
2. Discuss draft JV Technical Committee Roadmap Report and provide final feedback.
3. Review proposal to establish a new Science Team working group focused on Human Dimensions and Ecological Services relevant to bird habitat conservation.
4. Succession planning for JV Science Coordinator position.

Technical Committee members present: John Coluccy (DU), Mike Eichholz (SIU), Auriel Fournier (INHS), Bob Gates (OSU), Wayne Thogmartin (USGS), and Greg Soulliere (FWS-JV). JV Coordinator Doug Gorby also participated in the meeting. TC members Frank Nelson (MDC) and Kiandra Rajala (FWS-SA) were absent but both assisted with pre-meeting scoring of grant applications, and Kiandra and Greg had a recent one-on-one discussion regarding above agenda topics.

Ranking NOFO Proposals for Funding Support

The JV and Region 3 Migratory Bird Program (MB) combined funding for the 2022 NOFO, resulting in $200,000 available to address science needs of the two programs, which have overlap in geography and information needs. The JV-MB NOFO guidelines focused largely on building science foundation through research and monitoring projects, filling information gaps and testing assumptions related to bird conservation in the JV region. The two proposals received following the NOFO were shared with TC members in early summer. Members reviewed and ranked each proposal for "topic value" (does proposal address an identified JV need) and "technical merit" (is proposal scientifically sound). Individual TC member scores were returned to Greg and these scores, plus related email comments, were compiled in a spreadsheet and returned to TC members to review before today's meeting. This information provided the foundation for our meeting discussion and project-funding recommendations:

Recommended for funding – ***Mapping non-breeding distributions of four at-risk migratory forest birds under current and future land use and climate change*** ($13,848 Year 1, $56,157 total over 2 years)

- Project would address information needs for Canada Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, and Wood Thrush. Seeks to improve understanding of migratory pathways, stopover habitat, and winter distributions through integration of large existing datasets and new Motus tracking data with explanatory datasets such as land cover for eastern North America and Latin America.
- There was some TC concern that research findings may have limited habitat-delivery application for JV geography. However, considering emphasis on full-life-cycle planning,

and need to determine which period (breeding, migration, wintering) most limits population growth, this study's focus on migration and wintering habitats will have application for our JV geography informing prioritization decisions on breeding habitat management.

- Proposal considered technically sound, with high value to JV, as it addressed multiple research objectives generated by the JV Landbird Committee and stated in the 2020 JV Landbird Habitat Strategy, as well as more specific priority information needs posted on the JV website.

Not recommended for funding support – ***Identifying Avian Migratory Stopover Sites for Conservation Action*** ($50,000 Year 1, $100,000 total over 2 years)

- Project would assess stopover areas in Minnesota by mapping and classifying patterns of use by migratory birds at five NEXRAD sites across Minnesota during fall and spring migrations of the past five years (2017 – 2022). Project would include developing statistical models to predict habitat use patterns between NEXRAD sites, thus "wall-to-wall stopover use across the state." The project would also characterize spatial-temporal variability in migrant bird composition using weekly eBird STEM maps, potentially valuable to prioritize stopover areas for conservation and management based on integrating stopover use and species composition.
- Although the research concept seemed sound, several potential flaws in the proposed project were identified: a) Small spatial scope of the research, and lack of clarity whether results would provide inferences pertinent to BCR or JV-regional scale; b) use of eBird STEM models for depicting species status and trends may be inappropriate for the resolution desired (important to realize uncertainty associated with eBird trend estimates); c) concern over resolution of model-based trends resulted in questioning the merit of objective 4 (imprecise trend estimates may bias perception of trajectory); d) given that relevant eBird products are new and generally lack peer review, it is difficult to estimate value of study results, and e) there was concern regarding proposed extrapolation of relatively course NEXRAD data.
- The proposal had generally high topic value but low technical merit, in part because the modeling approach was largely undefined in the proposal, and there was little integration between objectives 2 and 3. Objective 3 seemed "tacked on" with limited explanation. In addition, the proposed project is relatively expensive, and potential results do not seem commensurate with the cost.

Note about 2022 NOFO: Only two applicants responded to the 2022 combined JV-MB NOFO, and this concerned the TC, considering the numerous (10 – 15) proposals received by the JV alone during past years. Two primary issues were identified as likely contributors to the low NOFO response rate: 1) the increasing complexity of federal grant applications, generally (current JV-MB NOFO is 20+ pages), and 2) the growing cost of research projects with a field data-collection component. Many of the posted JV research and monitoring priorities would require a field component, and fieldwork, especially with larger-scale (e.g., BCR) implications, is expensive, often with costs well beyond the $100K NOFO proposal maximum. Furthermore, the growing need to cost-share these expensive projects across multiple partners, who may

have varied fiscal-year timing and or uncertain financial budgets, was identified as a barrier to potential grant applicants.

JV Technical Committee Roadmap Report

Developed by the 2021 members of the Technical Committee (TC) over the past two years, the title of the current draft report is *Evolution of the Upper Mississippi / Great Lakes Joint Venture Technical Committee and Science Team: 2003–2022 and Roadmap Forward.* Greg has incorporated all feedback from the old TC members (report authors) as well as comments and editorial recommendations from our three new TC members (Kelly, Kiandra, and Auriel) and other reviewers. The document provides a valuable history of our group and recommendations for a path forward regarding technical needs and potential ways to fill those needs.

In preparation for this discussion, TC members were asked to review a near-final version of the document and be prepared to provide any additional feedback during our gathering. Greg plans to deliver Doug Gorby and the JV Management Board a refined (maybe final) version of the report before their planned 16-17 August meeting in Wisconsin. Following are comments and or areas of concern TC members indicated during this portion of the meeting:

- The roadmap report will be especially valuable to inform new JV partners about our science-foundation history, and to current partners evaluating capacity-building alternatives to meet our evolving technical needs.
- Conservation social science (HD) capacity is an obvious need, especially as we consider the declining trend in some traditional conservation supporters (e.g., waterfowl hunters) and seek to determine what motivates behaviors of potential new stakeholders/supporters.
- HD-related evaluation can help the JV better align future conservation activities with social concerns beyond hunting and birding, such as the many physical ecological services (ES) identified in Figure 1 of the roadmap report.
- The report should emphasize potential new funding sources to help support JV conservation activities, beyond current NAWMP support.
- Figure 1, and the report in general, has a strong waterfowl orientation, and perhaps there are opportunities to integrate concerns of the other bird groups, especially those with highly imperiled species.
- Although Figure 1 was developed by the JV Waterfowl Committee, the primary components (Population and Habitat Goals, Conservation Delivery, Ecosystem Services) apply to all bird taxa and subcomponents in the figure can be easily adjusted to reflect relationships between conservation, bird populations, and ES for grasslands and forests (the current figure provides a waterfowl/wetland example of factors and linkages).
- The TC should deliberate moving away from current bird taxa-focused JV Science Team working groups to a landscape cover type focus (grassland, forests, urban) that may better align with developing JV Conservation Delivery Networks (CDNs), and the proposed HD / ES working group may help integrate (“cross pollinate”) across new land cover / CDN collaboration efforts.
- The Urban Birds / Developed Lands chapter of the 2020 JV Landbird Habitat Strategy was forward thinking (re HD) and could be a valuable example for all JV science committees

when assessing future conservation barriers and challenges in urban and suburban landscapes, which are rapidly expanding in the region.

New HD / ES Science Team Committee

Discussion regarding the TC roadmap report naturally transitioned into this agenda topic, as growing capacity in Conservation Social Science is a key recommendation in the report. Although there was some concern that ES and HD entailed distinct expertise and skill sets, HD research is likely essential to understand the ES most important to people and potentially useful in targeting future JV conservation actions most relevant to society. The roadmap report helps relate the necessary linkages between HD, ES, and Communications and Outreach, and the need to build JV capacity in all these disciplines to increase effectiveness. Since roadmap report recommendations are intended to be implemented over time ("next several years"), the TC suggested starting with expanding our HD focus. And, like recommendations in the report, TC discussion today reiterated the need to consult and collaborate with the JV Management Board on steps for "moving forward." The JV Waterfowl Committee is planning to dedicate a portion of their November 2022 meeting to the HD/ES theme, with several topic specialists joining the committee discussion. Doug Gorby indicated an interest in joining (virtually), and today TC members recommended the TC and current JV bird-group committee chairs join virtually for this portion of the JV Waterfowl Committee meeting. Information from the planned discussion this fall, and related feedback from the JV Management Board (topic on their August meeting agenda), will be used by the TC to finalize a decision regarding establishment of the new HD / ES committee.

Succession Planning for JV Science Coordinator

The TC briefly discussed plans for the JV Science Coordinator position following Greg's likely retirement at the end of 2022. Mike suggested the position has been essential in keeping the TC and ad-hoc bird-taxa committees moving forward and building a strong JV science foundation over the past 18 years. Bob added that our transition to better understanding of HD and ES will require even more science capacity and coordination in the future. Doug mentioned the JV Board will need to weigh-in on this decision (how/when to fill the position) and that coordination needs in habitat delivery, especially with CDNs, is also growing. Wayne and others proposed the Board could explore potential cost-share opportunities to expand JV staff capacity, and we ended with the TC expressing a firm need for a JV Science Coordinator as well as growing capacity in other technical areas, taking advantage of new funding sources and potential JV-partner cost-sharing opportunities.

The TC meeting began at 9:00 ET and ended at noon.

The mission of the Upper Mississippi/Great Lakes Joint Venture (2001, 2018 Bylaws) "*is to deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships.*" **The mission of the JV Technical Committee** (2003 Bylaws) is *"to improve the scientific foundation for bird conservation within the Joint Venture under the direction of the Joint Venture Management Board."*