

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan

Building Partnerships for Shorebird Conservation

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To: Jerome Ford, Mike Johnson, Brad Bortner, Charisa Morris
CC: Clint Riley, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council members
Date: December 6, 2013
Re: USFWS leadership and support of U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council strategic goals

Hello Jerome, Mike, Brad, and Charisa:

We are writing to express our sincere appreciation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's investments and leadership to date in shorebird conservation in the U.S. and internationally. We urge your active and continued support for the conservation of this group of highly migratory, iconic, yet vulnerable, U.S. trust species.

It has been over a decade since the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan was published. We have made great strides in growing the essential partnerships to achieve the conservation goals therein, including integrating activities with Joint Ventures across the country, establishing an operational 10-country shorebird monitoring and research network, and adding key sites to the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. Recently, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council completed an assessment of our strategic priorities over the next five years. As you will recall, we presented our priorities as well as an estimate of resource needs at the U.S. NABCI Committee meeting in summer 2012. We also discussed with you what we consider a minimal operational budget in subsequent communications. We are hoping to restart that dialogue with you.

First and foremost, we urge your continued commitment to provide full-time support of the USFWS National Shorebird Coordinator position, currently filled by Dr. Brad Andres. We do not take for granted the invaluable contribution of this position to shorebird conservation in the U.S. and its role in providing critical support to the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council. The position is a critical link between our conservation partnership, of which the USFWS is among our most important leaders, and the extensive resources of the USFWS, including its biological and habitat management expertise and refuge system. The position is also a critical link to our country's most effective habitat delivery partnerships - Joint Ventures - and our voice in some of the most important decisions regarding threat abatement in the U.S. and internationally. Brad Andres provides shorebird technical expertise to a number of USFWS programs on a regular basis. While the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council is a true partnership with NGOs and states playing key roles and bringing significant resources to the table, the national coordinator position is a role we depend upon the USFWS to fill - a role that leverages these major partner investments.

We recognize that these are challenging budget times and that there are a myriad of other species and conservation issues to tackle, with threats only growing. We do have a responsibility to care for common and declining migratory birds, regardless of whether they are considered game species in the U.S. and regardless of whether there are immediate regulatory battles to be fought. As you know, most shorebird populations are declining, yet there are significant opportunities to abate known threats.

Additionally, there are partnerships dedicated to understanding factors driving these highly migratory species to lower and lower population sizes, and that are poised to manage the critical habitat to support these species given the appropriate tools and resources. We need to seize these opportunities and leverage these partnerships to stop population crashes. We should also advance the use of shorebirds as indicators of ecological changes to assist communities in their adaptation planning.

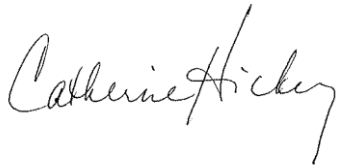
We sincerely hope the USFWS Migratory Bird Program will maintain, if not expand, its role in national and international shorebird conservation. We look forward to discussing creative ways to harness USFWS resources toward this end. We understand you have identified a national champion for shorebird conservation in one of your Assistant Regional Directors, Clint Riley. And we are very fortunate to have one of his very close colleagues, Dr. Brian Smith, now participating on the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council. We appreciate the dedication of that staff investment and will pursue dialogue with them, especially around how we can leverage regional biologist expertise in the U.S. in advancing U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan goals.

We are writing on behalf of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council and its thousands of collaborators across the U.S. and internationally, but we want to note that we sincerely hope you will continue to place a high value on the work of the multiple proactive partnerships for the “non-game” groups in the U.S. and invest accordingly.

We look forward to continued dialogue. Specifically, we are hoping you will be able to meet with representatives of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council near the dates of the winter U.S. NABCI Committee meeting (February 4 or 5, 2014). We will follow-up to try to schedule a short block of your time.

Thank you so very much.

With sincere appreciation for your leadership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Hickey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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