

# The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership

## *Building Collaborative Action for Shorebird Conservation*

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Mrs. Sarah Mott, Chief, Division of Bird Habitat Conservation  
Mr. David Gordon, Chief, Branch of Science and Planning  
Migratory Bird Program  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Falls Church, VA

Dear Sarah and Dave,

We are writing to express our sincere appreciation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's investments and leadership 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.

We have made great strides implementing the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and growing essential partnerships to achieve shorebird conservation goals the plan established. This includes integration of key activities with Joint Ventures (JVs), establishing an operational shorebird monitoring and research network in 11 countries, adding key sites to the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and addressing threats across shorebirds' annual cycles. Recently, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council (hereafter Council) completed an assessment of our strategic priorities over the next five years to ensure we are focusing on the highest priority partnerships, limiting factors, and landscapes and species to achieve our collective conservation goals. A key factor to achieving our goals is a minimal operational budget to facilitate the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership (USSCP), which the Council has previously estimated to be on par with the species JVs (e.g., Sea Duck). We have discussed this with Migratory Bird Program leadership and the U.S. NABCI Committee (August 2012) in the recent past. With the reorganization within the USFWS Headquarters Migratory Bird Program, we are hoping to continue that dialogue with you.

We understand the recent re-assignment of the national coordinators of the Bird Conservation Partnerships to the Branch of Science and Planning, within the Division of Bird Habitat Conservation (DBHC) was a move to increase collaboration with the habitat JVs. Although we are certain communication and partnership gains will be made through this re-assignment, the Council wishes to ensure that adequate funding will exist to conduct USSCP activities and support the National Coordinator.

First and foremost, we do not take for granted USFWS' invaluable contribution of funding for the National Shorebird Coordinator position, currently filled by Dr. Brad Andres. The position is a crucial link between our conservation partnership (of which the USFWS is among our most important leaders), extensive resources of the USFWS (including its biological and habitat management expertise and refuge system), and our country's most effective habitat delivery partnerships - Joint Ventures. The National Coordinator is also our voice in some of the most important decisions regarding threat abatement in the U.S. and internationally. While the Council is an active and diverse partnership, the National Coordinator position is a role we depend upon the USFWS to support – a role that leverages these major partner investments at regional, national, and international scales.

Additionally, we must identify a way to maintain and ultimately increase the support provided to the USSCP by the USFWS, without impacting the existing programs and JV partnerships in DBHC. We recognize that several JV partnerships are minimally funded, and the program's overall budget could not support the three "new" Bird Conservation Partnerships in DBHC without causing major impacts to each and every JV office and partnership. In the past, the National Shorebird Coordinator's funding has come from the Division of Migratory Bird Management's base funding, but more substantially from the Focal Species program and the Survey, Monitoring, and Assessment (SMA) fund. Under these tight budget times, SMA funds have now been re-directed to other programs, and we are concerned that the remaining Focal Species funds will follow a similar path. Therefore, we would like to discuss how the reorganization will affect the availability of Focal Species funds to the USSCP, and what other funding opportunities we may have through DBHC.

Although budget times are challenging, we believe the USFWS does have a responsibility to proactively and strategically conserve all migratory birds in the U.S., regardless of whether there are immediate regulatory battles to be fought. 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 are writing on behalf of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council and its thousands of collaborators across the U.S. and internationally, and we sincerely hope you will continue to place a high value on the work of the multiple proactive partnerships for shorebird conservation and invest accordingly.

We look forward to continued dialogue and extend our sincere appreciation for your leadership.

Sincerely,

*Brian W. Smith* /s/

Brian W. Smith, Chair  
U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council

Cc: Jerome Ford, Mike Johnson, Brad Bortner; Migratory Bird Program