



The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan

Building Partnerships for Shorebird Conservation

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U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council Meeting Notes (and subsequent follow-ups)

4 November 2009

Grand Hotel, Cape May, New Jersey

Development of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

In the fall of 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a national geographic framework for developing conservation-science partnerships (Landscape Conservation Cooperatives) to inform resource management decisions to address landscape-scale stressors, including climate change (see <http://www.fws.gov/science/SHC/lcc.html>). In anticipation of the further development of these cooperatives the U.S. Shorebird Council submitted comments on how best to integrate shorebird priorities into each cooperative's planning process.

While comments were specific to each region falling within the LCC, some examples of the Council's suggestions included:

- a. Support the implementation of a long-term monitoring program (i.e. the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring) for shorebirds that would provide information on habitat use and population size and trends.
- b. Determine habitat requirements, limiting factors, connectivity between breeding, migration, and wintering areas.
- c. Provide funds to equip a multitude of shorebird species with inexpensive geolocator devices that would allow migration timing and pathways to be determined.
- d. Evaluate potential impacts to breeding and staging shorebirds from coastal erosion and salt water inundation.
- e. Develop species-habitat models for representative shorebird species using coastal habitat types that can predict likely impacts to populations under different sea level rise

scenarios and determine impacts of climate change (through sea level rise, increased acidification and other factors) on key shorebird forage species and shorebird energetics during breeding, migration, and winter.

Off-Road Vehicle Use at Cape Hatteras National Seashore

In January 2010, the U.S. Shorebird Council submitted comments to the National Park Service as they are developing a draft environmental impact statement to address off-road vehicle use at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The Council urged NPS to use the best available science in managing the balance between shorebird protection and human recreation on Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Ample evidence has documented the negative effects of off-road vehicles and associated human disturbances on shorebirds, other wildlife, and beach habitats. Scientific studies, reviews, and recovery plans have recommended specific actions necessary to protect shorebirds from the negative effects of ORVs and other human disturbance. In addition, scientists working for the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) developed specific protocols for management of some protected shorebird species on the Seashore.

The draft environmental impact statement should be available for public review soon.

Development of a National Conservation Need Proposal

As part of the development of an annual funding opportunity facilitated through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (i.e. Multi-state Conservation Grant Program), the U.S. Shorebird Council submitted a draft proposal for the National Conservation Need (NCN). While the National Conservation Need seeks to address broad conservation needs, the U.S. Shorebird Council realizes that shorebirds stand to benefit through the better management, storage, increased accessibility and subsequent analysis of shorebird monitoring datasets. Our proposed NCN seeks proposals that would: 1) enhance or develop regional data centers that build on the ideas, tools, and infrastructure generated by National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) and Avian Knowledge Network (AKN) partners, 2) develop systems to integrate environmental and wildlife species information from state and local scales to track regional effects of natural perturbations like climate change and large-scale interventions like Farm Bill programs, 3) explore ways to integrate information at regional scales on a wide variety of wildlife species in a coherent and cohesive way, and 4) develop examples of how broad-scale sampling schemes or compilations of databases collected with differing protocols can address pertinent management and conservation questions and effectively improve conservation outcomes.

For more information on the NCN see - http://www.fishwildlife.org/multistate_grants.html

Guidance on North American Wetlands Conservation Act Standard Grant Technical Question #3

In 2004, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel who administer the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) asked the U.S. Shorebird Council to help develop shorebird focus areas that would assist development and evaluation of projects pertinent to the

criteria outlined in Technical Question #3. As specified in the Act, the shorebird focal areas identified in this document pertain to wetland ecosystems and their associated habitats. The resulting map is available at

<http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/NAWCA/Standard/US/Maps.shtm>.

In 2009, the NAWCA Council staff asked the U.S. Shorebird Council to review the map we provided to evaluate if a project was in an area of national importance and to suggest any changes. Through discussions with the USSCP Council Executive Committee and at the Council meeting in November 2009, we have come up with the following suggested changes. We are seeking input into these suggestions. These spatial designations should be national (i.e. population-level) priorities.

Changes to National Shorebird Priority Areas Map for NAWCA Standard Grant Proposal Technical Question #3 – 29 December 2009.

- a. Definition of coasts within BCRs 27, 30, 14, 31, 37, 32, 5 needs to be clarified. The thought is that the boundary is defined by the extent of low elevation, coastal wetlands. A similar idea is used for the Great Lakes wetlands. We will work to come up with a contour definition in the near future. Differences for Alaska include the entire Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, all of the Aleutian Islands, and the Arctic Coastal Plain ecoregion.
- b. Include the following BCRs completely: Playa Lakes (18, 19), Lower Miss (26), and Prairie Potholes (11).
- c. Sections of BCRs include: Rainwater Basin, California's Central Valley, Salton Sea, Mississippi and Illinois River Valleys, and Yukon Flats NWR.
- d. Additions will include a better boundary for Nebraska's Sandhills, extension along the Missouri River between the Mississippi and Prairie Potholes, and the Horicon Marsh area in Wisconsin.
- e. The Intermountain West Joint Venture Shorebird Team has recommended changes to the map, which should be included (available in a separate document).
- f. Deletions: central Florida and area demarcated off of Saint Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea.
- g. Wetland areas in Puerto Rico may also be designated before the 1 March 2010 deadline.

For questions or comments on the shorebird wetland focus areas, contact Brad Andres at brad_andres@fws.gov or 303/275-2324. We plan to submit comments to the NAWCA Council staff by 1 March 2010.

Conservation Priorities Guidance for Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants

The U.S. Shorebird Council, in late January 2010, received a request from the Advisory Group for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act asking for information on the initiative's priorities. Over the next few months the Council will be compiling information to specifically address the following questions. Information submitted will then be incorporated into the FY2011 NMBCA program.

- a. What are the priority locations in the Western Hemisphere for neotropical migrants (covered by NMBCA) in the plan (including breeding, non-breeding, and stopover)? What conservation actions are needed in these locations?
- b. What are the priority neotropical migrant bird species (covered by NMBCA) in the plan?
- c. What are the specific, priority research and monitoring needs in the plan, those that will translate directly into the conservation of neotropical migratory birds covered by NMBCA?
- d. What are the specific, priority outreach and education, law enforcement, or other activities in the plan that would benefit neotropical migratory birds covered by NMBCA?
- e. How can the above information be easily accessed by our partners in, at least, English and Spanish?

Shorebird Plan Assessment and Evaluation

The U.S. Shorebird Council continues to work on assessment and evaluation of the accomplishments of the initiative. A set of assessment components has been developed building off of the "Desired Characteristics" that the species and habitat Joint Ventures used to conduct their evaluations. Further, the Council is seeking to include funding aspects and an assessment of progress with respect to species or populations we have deemed "highly imperiled" under the plan. The Council is seeking to have a draft of this assessment completed by the fall of 2010.

Mass Audubon Predator Management Policy

The Council was asked to provide comments on a predator management policy developed by Mass Audubon staff and would be presented to Mass Audubon's Board of Directors. In early February, Mass Audubon's Board of Directors voted unanimously to approve the policy. One of the main reasons staff believed this went through was because of the great feedback that conservation organizations provided; their administration was impressed with the level of detail and support received through your emails and draft edits. This is a big step for Mass Audubon and the Coastal Waterbird Program, as well as for coastal bird conservation in Massachusetts.

US-NABCI Monitoring Subcommittee

At the request of the U.S. NABCI Committee, a set of recommendations were developed to address data management shortfalls for shorebirds. Efforts are continuing to integrate shorebird monitoring needs into Landscape Conservation Cooperative development. The narrative for the U.S. NABCI Committee is presented below.

Enhancing the usefulness of data collected through the International Shorebird Survey (ISS) was identified as the highest priority data management need for shorebirds. ISS data are used principally for conservation and management initiatives during shorebird migration. During the last five years, ISS evaluations have helped formulate practices in federal agencies as varied as the U.S. Forest Service, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as dozens of state agencies. ISS data are the only broad-scale information available on shorebird populations that are not temperate breeders. Building a reliable ISS data management system will be useful for conservationists and managers across the country by providing them with local, regional, and flyway information. Immediate enhancements to the ISS will cost \$180,000 for two years and maintaining the enhancements will need an annual investment of \$90,000. Improvements include eliminating data entry backlogs, building a more user-friendly interface, and capturing additional information; these enhancements build on structures developed through the regional data centers of the Avian Knowledge Network. Support for shorebird surveys in the west would be accomplished through AKN regional data centers.

Beyond ISS, there is a need to enhance the longevity and use of information collected previously in several broad-scale surveys, including the range-wide Snowy Plover survey, Long-billed Curlew survey, and arctic breeding surveys. Ensuring this information is well documented and readily accessible will be useful to assess shorebird response to a changing climate. Immediate improvements to these datasets will cost \$100,000 for one year and will require a \$50,000 annual investment thereafter.

Lastly, developing an effective color-band reporting system is useful for both science and engaging the public in bird conservation. Systems have been developed for Red Knots and American Oystercatchers, but there is a need to expand beyond these two species. A \$50,000 annual investment is needed to gradually improve, maintain, and coordinate the color-marking reporting system for shorebirds.

Total needs for shorebirds are: \$330,000 for the first year, \$280,000 for the second year, and \$190,000 for long-term investment.

Meeting of the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring

We will hold a half-day meeting of the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM) on Friday, 12 Feb 2010, from 8:30-noon or 1, immediately following the AOU/COS/SCO meeting in San Diego, CA. The meeting will be held in the Stratford Room of the Town and Country Resort (the official meeting hotel for the AOU/COS/SCO meeting; <http://www.birdmeetings.org/cosaousco2010/>). We are extending an invitation to attend the

PRISM meeting to members of the PRISM steering committee, the USSCP Council, interested participants of the AOU/COS/SCO meeting, and shorebird enthusiasts.

We will first hear about shorebird monitoring in the past decade, then address what gaps remain that should command our immediate and longer term attention. A proposed agenda is:

- 8:30 Welcome, introductions
- 8:40 Status of Arctic PRISM – J. Bart, P. Smith
- 9:30 Shorebird monitoring in California and the west – C. Hickey, M. Reiter, G. Page
- 10:30 Break
- 10:40 PRISM activities along the Atlantic coast – S. Brown
- 10:50 Arctic Shorebird Demographics Network (Brown)
- 11:05 Plans for our next Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group (WHSB) meeting – R. Lanctot
- 11:10 Updates on Population Size and Trends committee and the Migratory Bird Survey Bird Manager – A. Farmer
- 11:30 Next steps (brainstorming session by all)
What gaps remain that should command our immediate and longer term attention

Somewhere between 12 – 1 Adjourn

Contact Susan Skagen, at skagens@usgs.gov or (970) 226- 9461.

Arctic Shorebird Demographic Network (ASDN)

The purpose of the network is to examine demography of breeding shorebirds collaboratively across the arctic. The overall goal of the project would be to collectively develop a demographic analysis for one or several target species that would address potential limiting factors by differentiating survival rates at various life history stages. In addition, a wide variety of other information could be collected to help meet goals identified by participants working at specific sites. General protocols from a variety of sources (e.g, Barrow shorebird breeding ecology protocol, WCS Predator Study protocol, Arctic Wolves) are being evaluated and combined to develop draft protocols for the larger ASDN group to consider for implementation in 2010.

The group is gearing up for the 2010 field season and has had several teleconference over the last year. Plans are underway for the following sites to begin work in 2010, some funding dependent: Nome, St. Lawrence Island, Barrow, Ikpikpuk, Prudhoe Bay, Arctic Refuge, Mackenzie, East Bay, and Churchill. Additional sites that may be added in 2011 include YK Delta/Hooper Bay, and Coats Island, and potentially Susitna Flats. NJ Audubon is conducting an extensive banding/resighting and aerial survey project for SESA in South America, and is excited about developing a rangewide demographic analysis along with ASDN partners.

For information about the ASDN, please contact Stephen Brown at sbrown@manomet.org.

John Cecil and Brad Andres, 5 February 2010.