

# Strategy for Implementing the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (2012–2016)

*U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council*

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## **Organizational History**

In 2000, partners from state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations across the country pooled their resources and expertise to develop a conservation strategy for migratory shorebirds. The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (USSCP) provides a scientific framework to determine species, sites, and habitats that most urgently need conservation action. The main goals of the plan are to ensure that adequate quantity and quality of shorebird habitat is maintained at the local level and to maintain or restore shorebird populations at the continental and hemispheric levels. Separate technical reports were developed for a conservation assessment, research needs, a comprehensive monitoring strategy, and education and outreach. Concurrent with the development of the national plan was the generation of the 11 regional conservation plans. Although some outreach, education, research, monitoring, and habitat conservation programs are being implemented, accomplishment of conservation objectives for all shorebird species requires a continued, coordinated effort among all stakeholders.

## **Governance**

Since 2001, the USSCP Council has served as the steering committee for the USSCP and oversees the implementation of the regional, national, and international goals of the plan. Besides the 12-member Council (consisting of representatives from agencies, non-governmental organizations, Joint Ventures, and Landscape Conservation Cooperatives), a group of ten advisors provides additional input to the Council on the general direction of the USSCP and on specific policy issues. Several committees have been established to address specific technical issues and include: Population Sizes and Trends, Conservation Assessment, Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM), and Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) – U.S. Regional contacts with shorebird expertise are also tapped to comment on WHSRN nominations, Joint Venture implementation plans, and regional conservation issues. Minutes of the Council meetings, work by various committees, and the Council's policies are all posted on the USSCP website (<http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/>). Meetings of the Council, open to anyone, are generally held once a year.

## **Vision**

A World Where Shorebirds Thrive.

## **Mission**

To advance conservation of North American-breeding shorebirds throughout their entire annual cycle.

## **Operating Principles**

*Science.* The Council believes effective shorebird conservation strategies must be based on science. The conservation goals outlined below cannot be achieved without the underlying foundation of scientific knowledge about shorebird species and the threats facing them. This scientific foundation forms the link between the broad goals laid out in this document, and the specific conservation projects that are necessary to conserve shorebird populations. Science provides the information necessary to effectively identify critical conservation needs and to understand what to do about them.

*Partnership.* The Council believes that the most effective way to advance the conservation goals of the plan is through cooperative partnership efforts. This approach of cooperative action will guide all efforts related to implementation of the plan. Council members agree to work openly and cooperatively toward these common goals and to support the work of partner organizations whenever possible. Achieving the goals of the plan will require ongoing and committed action on the part of all state and federal agencies that protect birds, the many non-profit organizations involved with shorebird conservation, and a significantly increased understanding and involvement by the general public.

## **Hemispheric Goal and Strategies (2000)**

Restore and maintain stable and self-sustaining populations of all species of shorebirds in the Western Hemisphere.

Strategy 1. Develop monitoring programs to determine whether shorebird populations are declining.

Strategy 2. Focus research efforts on determining factors limiting populations of declining shorebird species, and focus international conservation efforts on reducing the effects of these limiting factors.

Strategy 3. Develop coordinated shorebird conservation efforts with Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and Oceania/East Asia.

## **National Goal and Strategies (2000)**

Stabilize populations of all shorebird species known or suspected of being in decline due to limiting factors occurring within the U.S., while ensuring that stable populations are secure.

Strategy 1. Integrate shorebird conservation as part of a regionally-based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented, integrated migratory bird management program to deliver shorebird conservation in coordination with other migratory bird initiatives.

Strategy 2. Focus research to identify factors limiting populations of shorebirds in the U.S.

Strategy 3. Identify management actions that can ameliorate factors limiting shorebird populations in the U.S. and implement regional conservation programs to ensure that populations of shorebird species are not limited by any environmental factors within the U.S.

## **2011 Performance Assessment**

To assess current performance and identify improvements needed to increase performance, the bird conservation Joint Ventures (JVs) developed a "desired characteristics matrix" for all of the operational elements of a JV (e.g., biological planning and conservation design, monitoring and evaluation). For each element, targets to be minimally and fully functional were described, progress on obtaining full functionality was reported, current performance was rated, and improvements needed to become fully functional were recommended. Approaches used by the species and habitat JVs were combined to produce a template to conduct a USSCP assessment. By the end of 2011, language was developed, progress reported, and suggestions for improvements were drafted.

The strategies identified below frame the results of the recent performance evaluation within context of the hemispheric and national goals and strategies developed for the USSCP. Immediate tasks are those from the assessment that needed minor, moderate, or major improvements. Those elements rated as "good" in the performance assessment were determined to likely continue under the current levels of effort from USSCP staff and partners. Abbreviations at the end of the strategies relate to the Hemispheric Goal (HG), the National Goal (NG), and the strategies (S) identified under the original goals.

### *Organizational Performance*

1. Secure long-term, dedicated funding source to ensure basic operations of U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan partnership, including travel support of some Council members (all goals and strategies).

### *Biological Planning and Conservation Design*

2. Ensure regional participation on JV technical committees and LCC technical teams and increase communication among regional shorebird stakeholders (NG-S1).

3. Actively participate with JVs in newly formed Tri-Initiative Science Team. Develop methods to set population and habitat objectives and evaluate progress toward objectives. Continue with cycle of revising population sizes and trends (NG-S1).

#### *Conservation Delivery*

4. Establish habitat targets for all JVs and bring new partners into grant-making to improve shorebird habitat, including increased involvement in FSA and NRCS special initiatives and programs (NG-S1, S3).
5. Expand the offering of shorebird management workshops, update management materials, and offer technical support to land owners and managers interested in shorebird management (HG-S3).
6. Actively implement the WHSRN strategic plan in the U.S. (NG-S3).

#### *Monitoring and Evaluation*

7. Develop and implement population surveys for high priority species/regions and integrate monitoring information in shorebird conservation and management decisions. Determine species-issue interactions where vital rate data provide information for decisions, particularly for boreal and temperate breeders (HG-S2, NG-2).
8. Update the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM) strategy and improve communication among PRISM Committee to maximize monitoring effectiveness; communicate PRISM's role and accomplishments (HG-S1).

#### *Science and Research*

9. Conduct applied research to develop decision-support tools to guide shorebird conservation action throughout the annual cycle. Integrate tools into management and conservation decisions (HG-2, NG-3).
10. Determine how to incorporate climate change scenarios into shorebird conservation decisions (NG-2).
11. Expand the use of new technology to understand linkage of populations across annual cycle and promote genetic and stable isotope analyses with existing blood/feather samples (HG-2).

#### *Communications and Outreach*

12. Elevate the role of outreach/communication/education as a tool for shorebird conservation and increase the audiences for shorebird conservation outreach (HG-3).
13. Increase the effectiveness of the Shorebird Sister Schools Program. Ensure shorebirds are included in efforts of Bird Education Alliance for Conservation (BEAC), Flying Wild and other programs (NG-S1).

Table 1. Implementation of the USSCP 2012 Strategic Plan. Numbers in the first column refer to the 13 strategies identified above. Costs refer to annual operating budget (\$1.9M)

<b>Strategic Element/Strategy</b>		Potential Leads and Funders	Cost
	Activities		
<b>Organizational Performance</b>			<b>\$15K</b>
1	Council member meeting attendance, workshop expenses	USFWS - Mig Birds	\$15K
<b>Biological Planning and Conservation Design</b>			<b>\$45K</b>
2	Travel for regional representatives on JV and LCC teams	USFWS - Mig Birds Regional programs	\$5K/region
3	Meeting attendance for Tri-Initiative Science Team	USFWS - Mig Birds	\$5K
<b>Conservation Delivery</b>			<b>\$330K</b>
4	Develop objectives and reach out to new partners for habitat conservation – 1.0 FTE	USFWS - Mig Birds, NRCS	\$150K
5	Shorebird Habitat/Partnership Specialist - 0.5 FTE; management workshop expenses	USFWS - Refuges, NGOs	\$90K
6	Shorebird Habitat/Partnership Specialist - 0.5 FTE; solidify WHSRN in U.S.	USFWS - Refuges, NGOs	\$90K
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>			<b>\$750K</b>
7	Develop and implement population surveys for high priority species/regions and integrate monitoring information into conservation decisions. Determine where vital rate data provide information for decisions.	USFWS - Mig Birds, Refuges; JVs; USFS; USGS; NGOs	\$710K
8	Establish position to coordinate shorebird monitoring - 0.25 FTE	NGOs, USFWS - Mig Birds, USFS	\$40K
<b>Science and Research</b>			<b>\$600K</b>
9	Develop a base of funding for applied research to address limiting factors and coordinate research efforts – 0.25 FTE	Foundations, USGS, USFWS	\$240K
10	Conduct research to answer questions of effects of climate change on shorebirds	USFWS - LCCs, USGS	\$180K
11	Expand use of new technology to understand linkage among populations	Foundations, USGS	\$180K
<b>Communications and Outreach</b>			<b>\$160K</b>
12	Establish a national marketing/outreach specialist position - 0.5 FTE	NGOs	\$80K
13	Increase effectiveness of SSSP and other programs, education specialist - 0.5 FTE	NGOs	\$80K

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