

Survey of Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Sites in the USA

U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership Council

9 December 2014

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) Executive Office and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership (USSCP) Council developed a brief survey to 1) determine the current knowledge of WHSRN and shorebirds at designated sites in the USA, 2) assess the perceived value of being a WHSRN site, and 3) determine how sites can be assisted by WHSRN and the USSCP Council in regards to technical assistance for various components of shorebird conservation. The series of 28 questions were anticipated to take about 20 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire was originally sent to contacts at all 44 WHSRN sites in the USA with the option of completing the questionnaire and returning it by email or by setting up a phone interview. Eighteen sites responded to the initial inquiry, and a follow-up emailing was made to the 26 no-response site contacts. Responses were received from an additional eight sites, and a third, contact specific emailing was made. This report provides results of responses received from 32 contacts at 33 sites. Questions are presented below with a summary of the responses. Raw, numerical responses are provided in Appendix 1.

Much of the report presents quantitative results of the responses to questions. The summary in question #27, “What do you need the most to increase the effectiveness of shorebird conservation at your site”, serves as the starting point for developing a set of actions to improve the functioning of WHSRN in the USA. The USSCP Council views this as a collaborative process to be done in conjunction with the WHSRN Executive Office.

Thanks to the following individuals for making contacts and conducting interviews: Brad Andres, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Jim Chu, USDA Forest Service; Suzanne Fellows, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Dave Mehlman, The Nature Conservancy; and Bob Russell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Total response rate was 75%, and site responses were distributed across the Waterfowl Administrative Flyways as follows.

Flyway	No. WHSRN sites	Completed	% response
Atlantic	8	5	62.5
Mississippi	4	4	100
Central	13	10	76.9
Pacific	19	14	73.7
Total	44	33	75.0

Two sites in Alaska were combined (Nushagak and Kvichak Bays), so percentages were calculated based on 32 responses.

Background Questions

1) How much do you know about the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (a lot, some, very little, or absolutely nothing)?

90.6% of respondents indicated they had some to a lot of knowledge about WHSRN. Respondents reporting very little knowledge were relatively new staff at the sites. Outreach should be specifically targeted to Bowdoin, Chautauqua, and Humboldt Bay NWRs.

2) Do you know if your site is included in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (yes or no)?

93.8 – 96.9% of respondents knew their site was in the network. One of the sites with a “no” came from an employee with 18 months at the sites, whereas the site manager of 14 years responded with a “yes”. J Clark Salyer and Monomy NWRs would consider possibly upgrading the status of their sites.

3) What is the primary or exclusive ownership of your site?

The primary land owners of surveyed sites are either National Wildlife Refuges (50%) or are of mixed ownership (43.7%). National Wildlife Refuges are part of 82% of all designated WHSRN sites in the USA. Responses of individuals from sites of mixed ownership might only reflect the perspective of the individual’s organization rather than a collective view of all site partners.

4) How much do you know about the shorebirds that either visit your site or breed there (a lot, some, very little, or absolutely nothing)?

All respondents had some to a lot of knowledge about shorebirds at their site. Bowdoin and Benton Lake NWRs in Montana expressed the need to know more about how shorebirds use their refuges.

5) What are the three most important species at your site (species table provided)?

Many respondents indicated that their sites are used by numerous species, which varies among seasons. Information could be summarized if there is a specific question about a particular species.

6) Is shorebird conservation an active management priority for your site (yes or no)?

87.5% of the respondents indicated that active management is a priority for their site. Four sites indicated shorebird management was not a priority. Benton Lake NWR, MT, indicated shorebird management will become more prominent with implementation of their Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Although Greater Skagit and Stillaguamish Delta suggested no active management, the WHSRN site profile indicates that “the

portions owned by the State, TNC, and land trust are all actively managed for wildlife values including shorebirds”. The response may be a perspective of tidal areas, as might be the case for the Columbia River Estuary. Nushagak and Kvichak Bays in Alaska are tidal areas and associated natural uplands that do not require land management. Sometimes not all partners are engaged in active management when ownership is mixed; we should probably have structured the question to ask about all site partners. For example, “Grays Harbor is actively managed for shorebirds (1472 ac). The entire estuary (94 sq mi) includes many landowners who do not consider shorebirds to be a priority.”

For each of the following questions, respondents reported how important it was to them (as very, somewhat, not very, not at all, or don't know/uncertain). Important = very + somewhat.

7) Be designated as a WHSRN Site?

93.8% of respondents thought the designation was important [very (71.9%), somewhat (21.9%)], with a few comments that the “label” was important in getting initial recognition. The single “not very” was from the Yukon Delta NWR, Alaska, where the Congressional delegation has held negative opinions about international designations and Alaska Native groups have not looked favorably on designations. Information on WHSRN and shorebird resources should be sent to Humboldt Bay NWR.

8) Receive information via WHSRNews?

This was a more equitable response among participants with 34.4% indicating very important, 40.6% somewhat important, and 18.8% not very important. 6.2% were not sure. Some respondents suggested the amount of information received from numerous sources makes it difficult to keep up. Need to add Mark_Fisher@fws.gov for Kelly’s Slough NWR.

9) Have access to information on www.whsrn.org?

Similar to the last question, 81.3% respondents indicated that having access to information on the website was important [very (46.9%) or somewhat (34.4%)]. Similar comments on the numerous information sources; one respondent suggested more updating of the WHSRN website.

10) Have your site information on posted www.whsrn.org?

Respondents placed slightly more importance (87.5%; 53.1% very) on having their information on the web than having access to www.whsrn.org. A suggestion was made to provide a more dynamic link to sites that would include updates and new activities. Another respondent was interested in the traffic to the website.

11) Have access to expertise and support at the WHSRN Executive Office or the US WHSRN Committee?

Respondents ranked this question the lowest in importance (37.5% very, 28.1% somewhat, 18.8% not very, and 15.6% uncertain). The low scores seem to be related to not knowing what type of expertise and support is available. Perhaps the most biting comment was “seems stagnant, not a true partnership”. On the positive note, Monomoy NWR “would love some technical expertise on implementing management and monitoring success”. Making sites aware of the web resources and other access to support would be worthwhile.

For each of the following, respondents reported how helpful to the conservation of shorebirds at their site it would be to have WHSRN's assistance (as very, somewhat, not very, not at all, or don't know/uncertain)?

12) Supporting conservation advocacy (e.g. letters explaining importance of the site and its shorebirds when requested)?

90.6% of respondents reported that it would be very to somewhat helpful to support conservation advocacy. Several comments on specific issues were provided. Outreach to sites to ensure they know WHSRN and USSCP Council policies on shorebird conservation advocacy could be worthwhile.

13) Providing outreach to new audiences (e.g., shorebird identification workshops)?

78.1% of respondents reported that it would be very to somewhat helpful to provide outreach to new audiences. Many of the sites are already engaged in these activities or believe their site is well advertised.

14) Providing a gallery of videos and/or photos you could use?

Only 25% of respondents indicated that this would be very helpful. Most sites seem to have access to photographers or on-line images.

15) Creating signage for the site?

81.3% of respondents thought that creating (and providing) signage for their site would be very to somewhat helpful. Respondents provided specific needs at their sites and the constraints of meeting agency guidelines on signage. A common theme throughout is the need to provide the larger shorebird context for the importance of their site. Follow-up on specific information content and funding needed for signage might be made to sites that requested this assistance.

16) Supporting creation/operation of a shorebird festival, other "shorebird gathering", or general bird tourism?

46.9% of respondents indicated it would be somewhat helpful to support bird tourism. Some sites already have festivals and support birding groups, but there were a number of specific inquiries for help with current efforts or to expand the reach or increase visibility. Remoteness of some of the sites limits viewing opportunities. Could "World Shorebird Day" be used a cornerstone event to build upon, relative to a site's capacity?

17) Understanding the needs of shorebirds at your site, the threats to them, and the most effective conservation responses?

84.4% of respondents thought it would be very to somewhat helpful to understand the conservation need and actions at their site. Threats are likely known at most sites, but understanding how shorebirds respond to management interventions, having the capacity to develop and implement conservation action, and sharing experiences is a recurring need.

18) Developing measures to demonstrate effectiveness of projects?

81.3% of respondents indicated that this would be very to somewhat helpful. Respondents commented on the value of developing and implementing standardized measures.

19) Linking with other important shorebird sites (e.g., exchange visits or to get people excited about the length and scope of the shorebird migration)?

Of all the "helpfulness" questions, the linking and networking of sites gathered the highest percentage of respondents who thought this would be very helpful (59.4%; 87.5% very + somewhat helpful). The comments indicate respondents realize the value of protecting the network.

For each of the following, respondents reported how helpful it would WHSRN could offer training or skill building in the following areas (as very, somewhat, not very, not at all, or don't know/uncertain)?

20) Managing habitat for shorebirds or creating shorebird management plans?

One of the highest in this group of questions, 71.9% respondents indicated that training in habitat management would be very to somewhat helpful, particularly if done locally. Expanded shorebird management workshops being offered by Manomet will help fill this role.

21) Developing communication skills including social marketing, social media, and the press?

Less than two-thirds (62.5%) of respondents thought this would be somewhat to very helpful. Few comments were provided.

22) Building good governance; getting all stakeholders to the table?

Identical response as the last question for helpfulness, but only 12.5% of respondents indicated that training in good governance would be very helpful. National Wildlife Refuge sites indicated this is already occurring within their public planning process.

23) Developing grant-writing and fundraising skills (e.g., for foundations, donors, government programs)?

Similar to the last question, only 15.6% of respondents deem this very helpful, perhaps because such a high proportion of the sites are federally or state owned.

24) Obtaining current information about shorebird numbers, declines, cause of declines and what people can do to keep our shorebirds in perpetuity?

This question stands out among the group as being the most helpful assistance WHSRN could provide to sites; 65.6% of respondents reported very helpful and 25.0% reported somewhat helpful. Comments focused on the need to collect local information as well as understanding the big shorebird picture.

25) Creating a program of shorebird site stewards or friends groups?

Evenly split between respondents indicating very or somewhat helpful (46.9%) to not helpful (43.8%). A number of the National Wildlife Refuge sites have friends groups or volunteers or are too remotely located for a friends group to be effective locally.

26) Developing measures to demonstrate effectiveness of projects?

Similar to question #18, but respondents indicated a slightly lower value in the helpfulness of this training (71.9%, very or somewhat). Not many comments provided. Could be part of a renewed shorebird management list. Exemplary results chains from the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Business Plan could be made available.

Challenges and Solutions

27) What do you need the most to increase the effectiveness of shorebird conservation at your site (narrative response)?

As is often the case, the need for internal capacity development of additional operational resources and staff to implement shorebird conservation actions was identified by many respondents. Beyond funding, many of the actions need to increase effectiveness of

shorebird conservation follow with the protection and management of sites and the need for better external and internal outreach. Most respondents indicated the desire for a stronger, more interactive network and the importance of having information on shorebird populations and conservation status that can be used to add context to their sites and the actions they are undertaking. In that sense, there is a need for WHSRN to be a “learning network” where ideas and information on shorebird monitoring, conservation status, management techniques and responses, and awareness and outreach can be freely exchanged. The shorebird management list-serve developed by the USSCP could serve this function and also reach a broader audience. WHSRN-specific issues/topics could be directed to the subset of WHSRN site contacts in the USA. It would be ideal for the WHSRN-US Committee to work in conjunction with the USSCP Council to address shorebird management issues in the USA. Specific needs identified by respondents are grouped by action categories of the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* and are presented below.

Land and Water Protection

- Develop land protection strategies for shorebirds that account for a changing climate.
- Expand WHSRN site boundary to include other lands and stakeholders.
- Ensure land protection strategies for shorebirds are implemented throughout the flyways.
- Identify opportunities to protect sites and habitats for shorebirds.

Land and Water Management

- Develop best management practices for stopover and wintering shorebird habitats.
- Improve the ability to manage water levels and evaluate shorebird response.
- Evaluate assumptions of models used in setting passage shorebird habitat objectives.
- Maintain tidal flat habitats from saltmarsh incursion and rising sea level.
- Identify and restore tidal flat, salt marsh, salt ponds, and other prime shorebird habitats.
- Control invasive plant species in shorebird habitats.

Species Management

- Determine how and manage effects of human disturbance on passage shorebirds.
- Determine effects of contaminants on shorebird populations.

Education and Awareness/Incentives

- Train volunteers to assist with shorebird surveys.
- Increase sharing of management techniques and shorebird response among the network.
- Improve connections across flyways.
- Increase local awareness of shorebirds and their conservation needs.
- Provide the big picture of shorebird ecology and conservation need.
- Increase awareness of the need for management interventions on behalf of shorebirds.
- Improve outreach for shorebird festivals and other events.
- Develop a shorebird conservation constituency through spiritual & emotional incentives.

Law and Policy

- Implement adequate climate change legislation.
- Include shorebirds in the site management planning process.
- Work with Army Corp of Engineers to develop dredging and spoil use guidelines.
- Secure water rights for too much or too little water for shorebird habitats.

External Capacity

- Receive technical assistance on monitoring, management, and project effectiveness.
- Create awareness of grant opportunities for shorebirds and their habitats.

28) Would you be willing to participate on a steering committee for WHSRN in the U.S.? (yes, no, or maybe),

37.5% of respondents indicated they would be willing to serve on a US-WHSRN Committee, and 40.6% of respondents indicated that might be willing. Of the “yeses”, the following respondents are suggested to form this committee, which represent a variety of organizations and geographies:

- Bolivar Flats – Richard Gibbons, Houston Audubon Society, Conservation Director
- Copper River Delta – Erin Cooper, USDA Forest Service
- Delaware Bay – Larry Niles, LJ Niles Associates
- Elkhorn Slough – Dave Feliz, California Dept. of Fish and Game, Reserve Manager
- Kachemak Bay – Geoge Matz, Kachemak Bay Birders
- Lake Erie Marshes – Rebecca Hinkle, Ottawa NWR
- Maryland-Virginia Barrier Islands – Barry Truitt, The Nature Conservancy (retired)
- Monomoy NWR – Stephanie Koch, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Rainwater Basin – Andy Bishop (RWBJV) or Joel Jorgensen (NE Game & Parks)

The National Coordinator of the USSCP would serve as staff to WHSRN-US. Individuals who have agreed to serve on the WHSRN-US Committee in the past would be queried to gauge their continued interest (some have retired and taken other positions).

For further information or comments, please contact: Brad Andres, National Coordinator, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 755 Parfet St., Suite 235, Lakewood, CO, 80439, USA; brad_andres@fws.gov; 303-275-2324.

Appendix 1. Numerical responses of 32 participants to questions about WHSRN in the USA.

Questions	A lot	Some	Very Little	Zero	
1) How much do you know about the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network?	15	14	3	0	
	No	Yes			
2) Do you know if your site is included in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network?	2	30			
	A lot	Some	Very little	Zero	
4) How much do you know about the shorebirds that either visit your site or breed there?	26	6	0	0	
	No	Yes			
6) Is shorebird conservation an active management priority for your site?	4	28			
For each of the following, how IMPORTANT to you is it to:	Very	Some -what	Not very	Not at all	Not sure
7) Have been designated as a WHSRN Site?	23	7	1	0	1
8) Receive information via WHSRNews?	11	13	6	0	2
9) Have access to information on www.whsrn.org?	15	11	4	0	2
10) Have your site information on posted www.whsrn.org?	17	11	1	0	3
11) Have access to expertise and support at the WHSRN Executive Office or WHSRN-US?	12	9	6	0	5
For each of the following, how HELPFUL to the conservation of shorebirds at your site would it be to have WHSRN's assistance?	Very	Some -what	Not very	Not at all	Not sure
12) Supporting conservation advocacy (e.g. letters explaining importance of the site and its shorebirds)?	14	15	3	0	0
13) Providing outreach to new audiences (e.g., shorebird identification workshops)?	13	12	5	1	1
14) Providing a gallery of videos and/or photos you could use?	8	16	6	2	0
15) Creating signage for the site?	14	12	4	1	1
16) Supporting creation/operation of a shorebird festival, "shorebird gathering", or bird tourism?	8	15	5	4	0
17) Understanding the needs of shorebirds at your site, the threats to them, and the most effective conservation responses?	15	12	3	2	0
18) Developing measures to demonstrate effectiveness of projects?	15	11	2	2	2
19) Linking with other important shorebird sites (e.g., exchange visits or to get people excited about the length and scope of the shorebird migration)?	19	9	3	1	0

How HELPFUL would it be to you if WHSRN could offer training or skill building in the following areas:

	Very	Some what	Not very	Not at all	Not sure
20) Managing habitat for shorebirds or creating shorebird management plans?	13	10	6	2	1
21) Developing communication skills including social marketing, social media, and the press?	7	13	7	3	2
22) Building good governance; getting all stakeholders to the table?	4	16	8	2	2
23) Developing grant-writing or fundraising skills?	5	14	10	2	1
24) Obtaining current information about shorebird numbers, declines, cause of declines and what people can do to keep our shorebirds in perpetuity?	21	8	1	0	2
25) Creating a program of shorebird site stewards or friends groups?	5	10	9	5	3
26) Developing measures to demonstrate effectiveness of projects?	14	9	4	2	3
WHSRN - US Committee					
28) Would you be willing to participate on a steering committee for WHSRN in the U.S.?	12	7	13		