



Building Capacity to Achieve Objectives of the U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan - Operational and Staffing Needs

U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council
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Partners from state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations across the country pooled their resources and expertise to develop a conservation strategy for shorebirds and the habitats upon which they depend. The U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (Shorebird Plan) provides a scientific framework to determine species, sites, and habitats that most urgently need conservation action. The main goals of the plan, completed in 2000, are to ensure that adequate quantity and quality of shorebird habitat is available at the local scale and is sufficient to maintain or restore shorebird populations at the continental and hemispheric scales. Separate technical reports were developed to assess the conservation status of each species, outline research needs, lay out a comprehensive monitoring strategy, and set a national education and outreach agenda (see <http://shorebirdplan.fws.gov>). Regional goals and objectives were also generated in 11 regional shorebird conservation plans. Although some outreach, education, research, monitoring, and habitat conservation programs are currently being implemented, accomplishment of conservation objectives for all shorebird species still requires a more intense and coordinated effort among traditional and new partners. Integration with objectives and needs of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (waterfowl), Waterbird Conservation for the Americas (waterbirds), Partners in Flight (landbirds), and gamebird initiatives will ensure conservation delivery is efficient and effective.

The U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council (Plan Council) serves as the steering committee for the Shorebird Plan and has worked to implement regional, national, and international goals. This needs assessment identifies the operational and staffing capacity that is required to fully implement objectives of the Shorebird Plan.

Shorebird Monitoring

Preliminary information indicates that the majority of shorebirds found in North America are declining. However, no rigorous, continental program is in place to assess population sizes or trends. In addition to providing information on all shorebird species, monitoring programs are needed to forewarn of species that might become species of conservation concern. Over the past two years, shorebird experts have developed the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM). PRISM has four primary goals: 1) estimate trends in populations of shorebirds, 2) estimate the sizes of breeding shorebird populations, 3) monitor shorebird numbers at stopover sites as an indication of habitat suitability, and, 4) use monitoring information to meet shorebird conservation goals. The four strategies to meet these goals are: 1) conduct breeding surveys in arctic and boreal regions of Canada and U.S., 2) survey breeding shorebirds in temperate

regions of Canada and U.S., 3) conduct surveys at migration sites across the Western Hemisphere, and 4) survey wintering populations throughout the ranges of all shorebirds. Development and implementation would involve distribution of funds to numerous federal agency, state agency, and NGO partners in the Shorebird Planning Regions. National staff are needed to coordinate surveys, maintain information databases, provide timely reporting of survey results, and perform statistical evaluations. (\$2.2M, 1.5 FTEs immediate; \$1.9M, 3 FTEs long-term)

Shorebird Outreach

Outreach is needed to increase awareness, understanding, and knowledge of target audiences about shorebirds and their conservation needs. A more informed public can assist in shorebird conservation. We propose to reach our audiences through a number of programs and tools. For example, the Shorebird Sister Schools Program is a national program that engages students and educators in learning about and helping with shorebird conservation. The Western Hemisphere Reserve Network is an outreach network that connects organizations that manages these sites, and provides additional resources to work with the public, manage the resources, and connect to each other. These programs engage numerous partners throughout the Western Hemisphere and Asia-Pacific flyways, who in turn reach thousands of communities. Using workshops and various educational materials, we also intend to reach out to private land owners and natural resource professionals to accomplish shorebird conservation. Funds for outreach would be used to develop a variety of outreach tools that would be designed to tell shorebird conservation messages and reach each target audience. National staff are needed to coordinate shorebird outreach efforts, in concert with other bird outreach initiatives where appropriate. (\$400K, 1 FTE immediate)

Capacity is also needed at the regional scale to develop and deliver bird conservation messages to educators, students, private and public landowners, and other audiences. Currently, there is some regional capacity to deliver the Shorebird Sister Schools Program. Regional staff and operational funds would be used to develop materials, disseminate information, and to conduct workshops (\$800K, 5 FTEs immediate; positions might be shared among shorebirds and waterbirds).

Regional Shorebird Conservation Plan Implementation

The Shorebird Plan was designed to be implemented within 11 Shorebird Conservation Regions each made up of several NABCI Bird Conservation Regions. Staff capacity is needed to ensure shorebird implementation and evaluation activities occur in all Joint Ventures and Bird Conservation Regions. Specifically, staff would 1) provide input into design of surveys, solicit survey participation, and meet regional survey allocation effort, 2) assure project implementation is consistent with population, habitat, and geographic priorities, and track accomplishments toward meeting shorebird plan objectives, 3) devise habitat objectives at sub-continental scales (e.g., BCR, JV, State, flyway) from

continental population objectives, and 4) compile regional habitat and population trend data for national/continental assessments. (\$1.4M, 10 FTEs immediate; these positions might be shared between shorebirds and waterbirds)

Shorebird Research

Recent analyses of shorebird survey data in North America indicate widespread ongoing declining trends that gives ample reason for concern about the populations of many species. However, the survey data do not provide information about potential causes. Possible causes for ongoing declines include climate change, habitat loss in the breeding or wintering ranges, contaminants, reduced quality or loss of critical stopover locations, recovering predator populations, or some combination of these factors. Because many of these factors could be remedied by conservation action, it is essential to determine which factors limit shorebird populations. Conservation action can only be effective at restoring populations if it addresses the factors actually limiting populations. We propose to focus study on limiting factors for species with existing information on breeding, stopover, and nonbreeding areas. Multiple species and spatial scales must be included. This effort will coordinate the efforts of researchers working on shorebirds, focusing in turn on each of several species for a five-year interval. (\$1.5M immediate)

Integrated Bird Conservation Support

The Plan Council envisions Joint Ventures as the lead organizations working to implement these habitat conservation projects in coordination with the regional shorebird groups. Broad staff and operational capacity is needed in Joint Ventures to deliver on-the-ground bird conservation (support \$10M for Joint Ventures, immediate).

There is a specific need to provide technical assistance to landowners who are interested in using grants from land use incentive programs (e.g., Farm Bill programs) to benefit wildlife. Capacity is needed to work with landowners to develop land use options that maximize the conservation benefits to birds (\$2.2M, 14 FTEs immediate; \$1.6M, 10 FTEs long-term).

Several grant programs specifically target birds. The Plan Council supports increases in authorization and appropriation of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. The Plan Council needs to work with shorebird plan partners to ensure shorebird projects are developed for these grant sources (\$25M for NAWCA, \$72M for NMBCA; over 5-10 years). The Plan Council also supports full appropriation of the Estuary Restoration Act of 2000 (\$2.75M, over 5 years).

State Wildlife Grants provide capacity for States to implement actions of all bird conservation plans. The Plan Council supports increased appropriation for State Wildlife Grants (up to \$300M long-term). Increased capacity will allow active engagement of

States in regional plan implementation.

The Plan Council acknowledges that increased international capacity is needed to ensure conservation actions benefit shorebird species across their entire ranges and therefore supports efforts to build international capacity.