

NSST Meeting Minutes Minneapolis, MN

June 5, 2007

Attendance:	
NAME	ORGANIZATION
Rob Holbrook	CVJV
Jorge Coppen	USFWS-NAWMP
Jim Dubovsky	USFWS-Region 6
Rick Northrup	Pacific Flyway – Montana DFWP
Steve Cordts	Mississippi Flyway – Minnesota DNR
Brian Sullivan	PLJV
Mike Brasher	GCJV
Mike Anderson	PHJV
Joe Fleskes	Pintail Action Group – USGS
Rex Johnson	R9 / R3HAPET
Mark Gloutney	EHJV
Ryan Reker	RBJV
Dale Caswell	AGJV – CWS
Kathy Fleming	USFWS - PHAB
Eric Reid	CWS
Mike Johnson	Central Flyway – North Dakota
Tim Moser	AGJV

Briefing Items:

NASA’s “TOPS” dataset (Rex Johnson): Rex briefly explained this dataset and indicated that NASA would like to see it used for bird conservation.

Action Item: Rex will forward information on this to Jorge for distribution to the NSST.

Migratory Bird Surveys (Rex Johnson): There is a problem with participation (and lack of consistent observers) due to budget cuts in the refuge system, etc. Rex polled FWS field staff and wrote a recommendation for a budget add-on to hire field staff specifically for migratory bird surveys. Mike Johnson suggested this budget initiative be expanded to include all surveys conducted by the Flyways.

National Wetlands Inventory (Rex Johnson): Rex had shared an NWI briefing memo with the NSST earlier; he gave NWI briefings at the North American conference. It is looking hopeful for the NWI to get a budget increase. Priority areas have been drawn and Rex encouraged the NSST to revisit these and to keep up with the NWI.

Accountability Framework Committee report:

M. Gloutney – NSST made a prior decision that Recommendation A.1, sub-elements a, c and e of the Continental Progress Assessment would be prioritized for work:

a. Better monitoring of key habitat trends such as extent of wetlands (all nesting habitat (breeding JVs), or foraging habitat (wintering JVs))

c. The approaches and assumptions associated with stepping down continental population goals to regional population and habitat goals should be reviewed and revised.

e. Development of more informative performance metrics.

The Plan Committee placed all of Recommendation A.1 (including all six sub-elements) at the top of their priority list for the “Science” category. Major outcomes were to include: Identification of performance metrics, step down objectives and net landscape change monitoring system.

Mark gave a good background summary related to the issues and needs. He addressed scale issues related to and “rolling up” regional habitat objectives to the continental scale Classification system issues- Is it correct? Does it need to be expanded?

R. Johnson - Whole set of activities under Recommendation A.1.a is “periodic” in nature. He expressed concern over issues with different imagery used. We want models informing us on variables we need. Use models to assess periodic habitat conditions; what is the gross effect of NAWMP? Models are at the crux of assessments and they may be revised in the evolution of the modeling effort. Look at models being used on U.S. & Canadian sides & look at variables they collect to relate them to waterfowl populations and give them the burden to assess impacts to waterfowl populations. Use what’s already out there as a foundation for our accountability assessments.

In the Accountability Framework Committee’s scoping document, need to reduce 10 recommendations in Recommendation A.1.a down to 3-4 refined sets.

M. Anderson - Agreed w/ Rex’s discussion but felt that lots of discussion needs to be had. Gave an example - Air/ground surveys with census of agriculture data analysis every 5-year to could be used to develop models that correlate habitat conditions to harvest.

Accountability Framework Committee’s scoping document contained much overlap & redundancy so there may be a more efficient way to format the scoping document.

Recommendation A1.a:

M. Gloutney – Having built waterfowl population models, can we draw out features within NWI we feel we need? Issue is not so much to go to NWI to ask them to change their data collection; Can we re-learn how to collapse down data?

M. Johnson - The big missing variable we need is a national “upland” inventory. Other Ag. source data needed to be considered to do the updates.

Waterfowl priority areas should be considered first for NWI updates.

M. Gloutney- Need to work on landscape-scale models of net change using NWI. Build more timely habitat change summaries. What time-scale would be feasible? Perhaps a 3-5 year interval; Annual interval no feasible. We could use low-level videography using an intensive stratified sampling protocol (stratified sampling plots in priority areas).

Building models for breeding or wintering JV scales? Consider that what we need to model will differ cross-seasonally, across the broader landscape.

Develop structured monitoring programs that track key habitat variables in key habitats.

Need a basic discussion on limiting factors & population change.

Need to assess & incorporate geographic specificity into tracking of accomplishments; Relates to performance metrics.

Ensure that monitoring programs allow aggregating & rolling this up to larger scales (i.e. life cycle, continental).

Need to develop a common set of variables shared among JVs to allow roll-up.

Link habitat objectives to continental *K* periodically (e.g., Every Plan Update).

Recommendation A1.b:

M. Anderson – Need models to estimate impacts of landscape changes including NAWMP impacts to waterfowl populations...so, modeling must be developed hand in hand with better monitoring systems.

1. Are we better off trying to develop insights on how habitat changes in breeding areas affect vital rates, or focus on insights for nonbreeding areas. It might be more cost-effective to focus on additional breeding areas.
2. Annual cycle model of vital rate variation incorporating environmental & landscape covariates based on research used to examine feasibility...a top priority recommendation.
3. While studies of landscape change on demography will have different characteristics from area to area, some coordination in this process is important (NSST needed to help). Inter-JV coordination effort needs to be preserved.

Need to drill down more and annual cycle models should help us to do this.

There are efforts on the prairies & US Great Lakes States plus efforts in S. Ontario to look at landscape attributes & effects on vital rates. There are other places as well where we need to expand on assessing the landscape variables that impact vital rates.

R. Johnson – Involved in a “Waterfowl Migration Modeling” effort which superficially found significant discontinuity related to fitness (life status) /survival in terms of cross-seasonal effects with decision rules applied for DSR and body condition as a duck moves from patch to patch. Cross-season modeling efforts seem to fit here as well as the emphasis on breeding grounds.

The breeding grounds modeling focus could be tasked to JVs with significant breeding grounds, whereas cross-JV cooperation might be more important focus for NSST.

M. Anderson - Multi-season, multi-stage modeling effort could help us get our arms around the annual cycle needs.

Need more information on wetland variability impacts to survival on nonbreeding areas and the subsequent influence on breeding populations (and the cost of effecting changes to address deficits). Annual life cycle model goes a long way to answering this point.

NOTE: For **Recommendation A1.a** - Change from “breeding JVs” to “breeding period”.

Recommendation A1.c:

R. Holbrook – Stepping down continental population objectives to JV habitat objectives...looked at examples of how JVs developed regional objectives...came up with list of considerations with a focus on looking to population objectives of the 1970s.

Assumption made that migration & wintering areas need a stronger tie to NAWMP as opposed to breeding areas.

Fig 1. was reviewed as flow chart to the process...

For Recommendation A1.c, need to boil it down to helping JVs with a range of options & may not be a “one-size fits all” affair. Assumption was made to focus on nonbreeding JVs.

B. Sullivan - Need to separate out breeding vs. nonbreeding strategies and build on that.

R. Johnson – The nonbreeding period essentially is birds moving thru an ecological region, staying for a period time (with a certain DSR) and sending birds down to next region in a sequence of events that culminates in bringing birds back to breeding grounds. Lots of assumptions here about DSR, transitional periods, etc. but it links all JVs within that nonbreeding portion of the cycle.

R. Reker – Views it as more of a linear flow chart.

M. Anderson - What Rex is advocating might provide a broader framework for NAWMP generally, but this effort under Recommendation A1.c could help as a component of that idea. This needs more thought from an annual cycle perspective.

Need a way of translating objectives across scales so we should not need to wait for any revision of NAWMP population goals, just build a process. Need to integrate with what Rex advocated here as part of the overall approach.

J. Dubovsky - At larger scales, essentially, it can be viewed as a simple model of inflows & outflows & finding an association for those input & outputs. At finer scales, it becomes more problematic.

B. Sullivan – Need Recommendation A1.c to keep a focus on “habitat goals.”

M. Anderson - What is next step? What do we envision for Recommendation A1.c after we visit with the Plan Committee?

R. Holbrook – Viewed it as guidelines for JVs.

M. Anderson - NSST task group is needed to think this through an annual cycle basis and provide recommendations to the NSST in perhaps a white paper?

J. Dubovsky - In prioritizing actions within JVs, using different methodologies nullifies any kind of “roll up”; Does not contribute to NAWMP continental objective assessments.

A couple “process recommendations” for each sub-element needed.

Action item: NSST Chair needs to update Plan Committee and recommend that we need to task a larger group to develop a techniques or white paper for approaching this more holistically.

Recommendation A1.d:

M. Anderson - Variability noted in how well JVs were tracking & reporting accomplishments.

The logical entities to charge with a comprehensive review for this issue would be the national offices in Canada & US.

NSST should be engaged to help in terms of assessing landscape changes, data needs and be useful for biological modeling and assessment purposes. Need to develop spatial attributes for accomplishments data for certain system. NSST, representing capability, should have their eyes on this but certainly not lead it.

R. Johnson - What is NAWMP accomplishment? Need an arbitrary definition here. Surmised there must be a tracking system in corporate world to deal with complex tracking systems. Need to consider the strategy of hiring a consultant with the expertise for building the process? Plan Committee needs to scope out how to get this done. NSST does not have expertise do address this need.

Recommendation to Plan Committee should provide supplemental thoughts of the value of advice from consultants (NOT a biological mater that NSST can add value to but that we urge to be done). National offices should address this.

NOTE: Need to have a look at Casey Stemler’s (PPJV) document related to this issue.

Recommendation A1.e:

J. Dubovsky - Use of vital rates important to understanding our mgmt. actions as they relate to habitat and the impacts to birds.

There are no real useful extant performance metrics to assess how Plan actions impact population objectives at the continental scale. Rolling objectives up from regional to continental scales is a long-standing challenge. Need to take off a manageable bite. Show progress in some areas.

Are population goals appropriate to assess performance? Whatever performance metrics we use, we need to show improved bird responses to mgmt. through our monitoring work. Need to develop performance metrics that look at changes in bird demographics linking to what we do in terms of on the ground mgmt.

Process recommendations:

1. JVs encompassing ranges of target populations should use objectives (e.g., population, vital rates) that can be used to assess progress of program activities at large scales (i.e., population, continental).
2. Science coordinators from JVs that share target populations should convene to discuss appropriate objectives and performance metrics for priority populations. Coordinators should pay particular attention to recommendations from the JTG and the Continental Assessment reports when formulating the objectives and metrics.
3. Once appropriate objectives are developed, monitoring programs and models need to be developed that relate habitat actions to bird responses.

R. Johnson - Take third bullet immediately above & apply it to data captured in **Recommendation A1.a** above to assess net accomplishments.

Need to consider these recommendations under the premise of large scale assessments of program impacts.

D. Caswell - If our overall populations are declining, even if we are successful in our component work, are we unsuccessful?

J. Dubovsky - We can use vital rates to effect change on small percentage of landscape at best, but we have no control on overall landscape.

R. Johnson – Viewed as potentially an exercise in “failing gloriously “ - there is value in our assessment showing that, in terms of net conservation accomplishments, we’re still losing ground to dispel notion to administrators that we can fend off losses occurring on the overall landscape even given our best effort.

Recommendation A1.f:

Focus on progress on accomplishing biological goals.
Progress with adaptive mgmt.
Progress in sharing ideas through the Plan Committee.
Breeding & nonbreeding JVs should report separately or perhaps by flyway beginning in 2008.

Plan Committee needs to provide feedback.

JV reports via flyway groupings was advocated by Jim Dubovsky.

Better linkage to Flyway system advocated by M. Anderson.

R. Johnson What's in it for the JVs?

M. Johnson - Face to face report from JVs to Plan Committee might be useful.
M. Anderson - Raised the logistical issue here that Plan Committee meets 3 times per year and we have 21 JVs to deal with (Maybe a 3 year cycle?).

Need a 4th bullet that communicates needs for improving cooperative efforts that help JV progress, so Plan Committee can assert influence to improve the situation. Dual structure of science & administration support is how JVs are supposed to function.

Action item: All NSST members asked to consider sending M. Anderson an e-mail re: thoughts on an E-W vs. N-S reporting format.

NSST will comment on the scoping document by **June 20** (NSST tasked with: Identifying opportunities to consolidate & condense; Advise on content & direction; Assess this scoping document in terms of improving effectiveness as a consultation document).

After June 20, NSST coordinator's revision goes back to Accountability Framework Committee for review.

NSST Coordinator prepares final draft of the scoping document for Plan Committee by **July 2**.

Action item: For final draft – the Accountability Framework Committee should shoot for 3-4 pages per section with prioritized process recommendations. Keep sections separate in text but, summarize & blend all the overlap and redundancy in Executive Summary for Plan Committee. Identify the “Whos?” there as well.

R. Johnson – Should appoint chairs of sub-element writing teams to ensure progress?

M. Anderson - Need to make progress on annual cycle modeling effort.
M. Anderson – Priority on ability to detect habitat change (net loss & gains).
M. Gloutney – Need representation with broader group N-S to review current state of understanding.

J. Dubovsky - Need to frame the issue as going back in time, most current & moving forward?

Working group needs to start before the next meeting? Reach out to people who are not on NSST.

Need to Pick a chair for each sub-group who identifies NSST/outside membership for working groups to show progress by next NSST meeting:

A –M. Gloutney or J. Coppen

B, D and F – M. Anderson

C- R. Holbrook or M. Petrie

E- Jim Dubovsky or R. Reynolds

Step-down Modeling Demonstration (Rex Johnson): Rex briefly demonstrated this draft model that he's been developing. It incorporates BPOPs, recruitment rates, survival rates, transition probabilities, etc. to model the abundance of birds in each BCR throughout the annual cycle. It could potentially be used as an alternative to Koneff's step-down analysis for establishing JV abundance targets, and also for establishing vital rate targets. It emphasizes the inter-relationships among JVs.

NSST Recommendation for Plan Committee to adopt draft JV IP criteria:

JV Implementation Plan Criteria (Brian Sullivan): Sullivan reviewed the draft JV Implementation Plan criteria that were developed by the NSST working group (Sullivan, Brasher, Northrup, Soulliere, and Uihlein). The document had been reviewed by the full NSST and the other migratory bird initiatives, and comments were incorporated. Sullivan also presented a draft NSST recommendation form (Recommendation No. 1) giving background on the need for the document, and indicating the NSST forwards the document to the Plan Committee for adoption.

Some NSST members indicated a desire to further edit the document. The NSST comment deadline had passed, but Sullivan said he expects another opportunity to revise the document when the PC acts on it.

The NSST unanimously approved this recommendation.

NSST Action Group Recommendations:

J. Coppen - reviewed what he had compiled from responses gathered from Spp. JV Coordinators and J. Fleskes, Chair (PAG).

He reviewed T. Jones' electronic response basically indicating that: 1.) NSST should not be recommending allocation of funds; 2.) Such decisions can only be made by the USFWS; and 3.) NSST should not decide any amount to be spent or allocated in a given area. He felt such recommendations weaken NSST's position as a science advisory committee and puts the NSST into the political realm.

J. Fleskes – Summarized his contributions to the NSST action group recommendations:

PAG recommendations were incorporated into the draft NSST Action Group Recommendations.

Progress on PAG objectives had stalled due to lack of support.
Support for waterfowl issues varies from group to group.
Recognized there are services that PAG needs to provide NSST.
Current limitations related to the PAG status as a “volunteer organization.”
Identified modest needs for travel support.
Need to address support for a more formal coordinator position?
Need to consider funding to elected chair of each group for part time support?
Some value added items need to be identified - looking at issues across the JVs.
If NSST is going to sanction these action groups, they must ensure they identify and provide support.
Need either a joint lead position or some support for elected chair for each group.

M. Johnson - On point 2 (page 2 of draft NSST Action Group Recommendations), action groups should elect their leadership. This appears a better approach than chairs appointed from above.

J. Fleskes - NSST had endorsed the SAT with the caveat of not recommending any aspect of funding. With action group chair travel needs (e.g., Flyway meetings, NSST meetings) \$10,000/yr. should cover it. Salary for a chair estimated at \$80-100,000/year.

M. Anderson – J. Fleskes’ model of “more time for less money” to support a chair within an action group (instead of hiring someone) may be more cost-effective. He suggested using Joe Fleskes’ model for moving the NSST action group recommendation forward.

R. Johnson – Expressed the value of work PAG has put forth on a collateral duty basis. He addressed the existence of \$150,000/yr. in DBHC discretionary funds to potentially fund NSST initiatives. First, NSST needs a clear understanding of what the priority needs are - and so he expressed reluctance to tie that whole \$150K to this type of funding need. NSST needs to develop a proposal for work with an assessment of critical priorities, to identify critical priority work that needs to be done and that deserve funding.

Action Item: NSST needs to develop a proposal for work with an assessment of critical priorities, to identify critical priority work that needs to be done and that deserve funding.

We could run this through USGS (RFP) and let PAG manage the work.

J. Dubovsky - Is the addition of one more person (funded position) going to make much difference in implementation of needs? Is it more valuable to find resources to advance the priority projects?

R. Holbrook - Travel is relatively small \$\$\$, so travel & project \$\$\$ may suffice.

NSST should give consideration that if an action group is sanctioned that a significant amount of funding provided should go to high priority needs.

R. Johnson – If the PC can provide say a one-time provision for \$20K with no promise for repeat funding in future, can PAG, or any other group the NSST sanctions, provide deliverables to PC?

B. Sullivan – The draft NSST Action Group Recommendations really state that these action groups are pretty much to be supported like Spp. JVs. Given the current climate for funding, this might be “dead on arrival”. Maybe another path to consider would be broadening current existing JVs to address more priority species (dabbler/diver sea duck, All geese)?

M. Gloutney – Cautioned that adding spp. to existing Spp. JVs would be adding responsibility beyond the new Continental Progress Assessment mandate to be responsive to habitat JV needs.

R. Johnson – Considered the option of providing financial support, through the NSST, to sanctioned action groups to fund priority projects.

M. Anderson – Cautioned that we don’t want to jeopardize the interest of individuals in action groups. Finding resources, living without identified dedicated funds or die & go away – That’s no choice. A proposal for a fully-funded JV (with a salaried Coordinator) would make this die & go away quickly.

If the \$150,000 DBHC discretionary funds are targeted for this FY, they need to be obligated fast. So, we’ll need an NSST short-list of issues we want to see addressed.

Action item: J. Coppen will check with Seth Mott to see if DBHC discretionary funds are available for FY 2007. If the funds are available for FY 2007, they need to be obligated fast. So, we’ll need an NSST short-list of issues we want to see addressed.

R. Reker – Advised we avoid staff funding ideas altogether. Use funds now towards research needs identified now. NSST needs to get some dedicated funds to address priority information needs.

M. Anderson –

Action Item (from M. Anderson): J. Coppen will convey message to PC that NSST endorsed SAT but is not in position to endorse proposal for funded coordinator positions. NSST will commit to assisting to find resources for dedicated resources to work with two groups (PAG, SAT). Convey to PC that we need to solicit RFPs to determine priority funding needs. We want to study this recommendation of funding beyond projects. Urge the PC to help us find sources of support for work of the action groups. Funding for chair for travel to meetings needs to be determined by PC.

M. Johnson – Put together an informational item to PC with ideas, issues, and open for discussion (i.e., here are the problems; here are the potential solutions).

Action item: J. Coppen will revise draft NSST Action Group Recommendations and submit to J. Fleskes for one final review. Then, produce final draft for NSST review before submission to PC.

S. Cordts – Provided an option considered as “thinking outside the box.” Consider funding one overall “Research JV” with all of the action groups and Spp. JVs competing for funds for priority projects?

R. Johnson – Identified that there is merit in the NSST bringing the PC a budget request for action group funding needs every year.

NSST Recommendations for Joint Task Group Report:

J. Coppen - Reviewed the approach taken by the ASC & JTG Report Review Committee to develop the JTG scoping document. Specifically, that the issues were grouped into six “issues areas” that relate to addressing the habitat side of issues. The scoping document consisted of an executive summary and a summary review followed by recommendations to address the issues cited.

M. Anderson – Advised we drop back and review the six recommendations contained in the JTG report itself.

J. Dubovsky - Reviewed the original six recommendations contained in the JTG report itself.

The NSST collectively espoused that they were not prepared to grapple with the JTG issue at this time.

M. Gloutney – Suggested a better starting point for our deliberations would be after the Habitat JV meeting scheduled for August 14, 2007 to review implications of the JTG report. It’s wide open for how to address this. Need to explore more habitat side implications before making recommendations from NSST. Recommended we say something simple about unifying waterfowl mgmt. and touch on concepts rather than the details of what is in the JTG report.

R. Johnson – Any recommendation as to when the “*waterfowl management policy summit*” ought to occur?

M. Johnson – Replied that his understanding was that it won’t be this fall.

R. Johnson – proposed a memo to PC relating that the NSST supports the JTG recommendations in concept but further consideration is necessary before an NSST response can be proposed.

Action item: J. Coppen will draft said memo to PC

J. Coppen - At their last meeting on April 17-18, the NSST Accountability Framework Committee discussed the notion that it would be helpful for consensus building to have a debate on what large-scale key habitat monitoring variables are to address net landscape change at the larger scale. The NSST, the JV Science coordinators and a “*modeler*” with AHM modeling expertise could meet to discuss this from the bird’s perspective (biological perspective). The heart of that is a linkage between habitat features and waterfowl limiting factors.

Since I am going to be working with the waterfowl migration modeling group during August 15-17 in Denver, I'm not available to lead an August 15 NSST meeting with the JV Science Coordinators to address what the large-scale key monitoring variables are.

Action item: J. Coppen will contact Ron Reynolds, Chair about leading an NSST meeting on August 15 in Denver re: a discussion on what the large-scale monitoring issues are.

Next NSST meeting:

B. Sullivan – After several difficult attempts to schedule a meeting, he suggested that the NSST should consider regularly scheduled meetings that are firm on dates to prevent future scheduling troubles for NSST meetings.

J. Coppen – Suggested sending out an electronic “meet-o-matic” scheduling template for the months of Oct- Nov-Dec. to assess best availability.

Let’s wait until we can find out if we might be able to piggyback a meeting with next PC meeting?

Action Item: J. Coppen will investigate possibilities for a PC/NSST joint meeting.

Need to consider having post – JTG/JV meeting discussions in Denver.
Need to commence 2009 Plan Update planning.

M. Anderson - NSST needs to develop a priority list for research project relating to action groups. Find out from Seth what the possible resources are for these. Short-term funding help might be part of the wish list. Some suggestions: Annual cycle model building; Studies of habitat mgmt. impacts to vital rates; body condition studies; More simulations around what M. Runge began work on re: implications related to trade-offs to solution to shoulder option /BPOP solutions.

Adjourn