

MAFWA Talking Points

Encouraging State Wildlife Directors to Focus on “All-Bird” Conservation

Bird conservation is nothing new. States have been managing bird programs (ducks, geese, turkey, quail, dove, pheasant, etc.) for more than 50 years.

Public support for bird conservation remains strong. Waterfowl and upland game bird groups are a potent force. They are well organized and politically influential at state and national levels.

Historically speaking, other bird interests have not been as well organized. Populations of songbirds, shorebirds, and nongame waterbirds didn't face the same pressure. Their pressures were slower to develop and more geographically dispersed. Still, the loss of breeding habitat, widespread use of pesticides, and changes on the wintering grounds have impacted them too.

In the last few years, groups have formed to help relieve the pressures on these birds. Groups like Partners In Flight, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan include public agencies, private organizations, universities, and dedicated individuals who work together on a voluntary basis to plan and carry out programs to slow bird population declines and help to “keep common birds common”.

State wildlife agencies have been involved with these groups from the start. The knowledge and experience of state biologists have been invaluable in the conservation planning process. Regional and national bird conservation plans are nearly complete. Now it's time to prepare ourselves for putting these plans into action.

Over the past year, IAFWA has sponsored workshops in a number of states to help make this happen. These workshops bring together the biologists, field personnel, and interested people from all sides to become familiar with the bird plans, explore opportunities for working together, and start creating the two-way communication which is so essential for success.

So, you ask, what can you do as a state director?

First, start asking questions! Somebody in your organization is working on this (or ought to be!). Asking questions about how your state agency is involved in regional bird planning will signal your interest and let your subordinates know that bird conservation is on your radar screen.

Second, have somebody come in and explain the plans to you. Think about how your state is or is not implementing the recommendations described in each one. Knowing the needs of different bird groups may not change the way you do business, but it just might help you to choose among different alternatives the next time you have to decide which programs or projects have priority.

Third, put a responsible person in charge. It's a tough job balancing the needs of land birds, waterbirds, and all the other forms of wildlife for which your agency is responsible. You'll want a person who can handle most of the day-to-day management decisions that come along and yet still can recognize those sensitive issues that should be “brought upstairs” for a decision.

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Fourth, check on progress from time to time. Let folks know that this is not a “bright idea” from your attendance here this week. Instead, make it part of your personal management checklist.