

Atlantic Flyway Migratory Game Bird Technical Section (AFMGBTS)
Input to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) Revision Steering Committee

February 2010

In March 2009, the NAWMP Plan Committee formed the NAWMP Revision Steering Committee to serve as a focal point for gathering, vetting and synthesizing ideas from the waterfowl management community and to advise the Plan Committee on the content of the 2011/2012 Plan Revision. The Plan Committee adopted a communiqué (PDF) outlining the goals and process for the revision. A first step in that process is a series of stakeholder input workshops in the United States and Canada to gain input from the waterfowl management community on the fundamental goals for waterfowl management in the 21st Century.

A series of 6 formal stakeholder input workshops (involving “structured decision-making”, or SDM) were scheduled to occur beginning in November 2009 and conclude with a gathering of Flyway Council members at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in March 2010. No formal workshops were scheduled specifically for the Atlantic Flyway, so the AFMGBTS (TS) conducted an informal workshop at its February 2010 winter meeting in St. Petersburg, FL. The TS deliberated over 3 separate work sessions to develop the following input from members with respect to the 2011/2012 NAWMP Revision.

Plan Purpose Statement

In the 2011/12 Plan Revision, the Plan Committee suggested an inclusive purpose for waterfowl conservation that would reflect the broad range of fundamental goals of Plan stakeholders. To that end, the Plan Committee proposed the following purpose statement in its December 2009 communiqué:

The purpose of the Plan is to sustain abundant waterfowl populations while preserving the traditions of wildfowling and achieving broad benefits to biodiversity, ecosystem processes and the people of North America. Plan goals will be accomplished by partnerships that conserve habitats and sustain populations, guided by sound science.

The TS believes that this statement is a reasonable representation of the vision of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Problem Statement

The Plan Committee Revision Steering Committee also provided a fairly lengthy and detailed draft Problem Statement to the waterfowl community asking for input on this critical part of the SDM process. The TS, after much deliberation, believes that the following more succinctly characterizes the problem that we face:

Although the waterfowl management community is in general agreement on the fundamental objectives of waterfowl management, it has not reached consensus on the means to achieve those objectives, nor the framework necessary for integrating multiple decisions in a way that efficiently allocates resources and coordinates actions.

Fundamental Objectives of Waterfowl Management

In addition to feedback on the Plan Purpose and Problem Statement, the TS wishes to convey to the Atlantic Flyway Council a suggested set of fundamental objectives that are inter-related but discreet enough to have different measureable attributes to evaluate plan progress or success. These are provided below. The TS felt that elucidation of measureable attributes in addition to the set of fundamental objectives would result in a more useful product than going through a hierarchical analysis of many possible objectives and producing several flowcharts and diagrams connecting “fundamental” and “means” objectives, as has been done in all the structured workshops that have been conducted. The Plan Revision Steering Committee has already received several variations of these flowcharts and diagrams, and the AF contribution to those would likely not be substantive.

Objective 1: Maintain healthy waterfowl populations (Populations).

Examples of measureable attributes: # populations at or near goal (population size and trend, not heading toward extirpation or overabundant and causing adverse ecological impacts); # of waterfowl hunting days; achieve certain level of annual recruitment; achieve certain level of annual survival; achieve certain level of body condition index; achieve certain seasonal distribution of waterfowl.

Discussion: the TS struggled to clearly define “healthy” or to come up with a better word, but the intention was that it referred to population status and viability, with some consideration of habitat carrying capacity, rather than health of individual birds.

Objective 2: Maintain landscapes capable of sustaining waterfowl populations in perpetuity (Habitat).

Examples of measureable attributes: # duck use days available on the landscape; # of moist soil impoundments (acreage); % connectivity of wetlands and foraging areas (juxtaposition-fractals?); % of grasslands within 0.5 mile of wetlands; %age of invasive vegetation in wetlands; % of land in various agricultural crops; acres of publically owned wetlands; dollars spent on habitat conservation; net gain/loss of wetlands/uplands; protected acres of waterfowl habitat (wetlands and uplands).

Discussion: the TS struggled to separate landscape goals from population goals, but it was clear that both were important and fundamental objectives of waterfowl management.

Objective 3: Maintain the tradition, societal values, and economic benefits of hunting and other recreational uses of waterfowl (Benefits).

Examples of measureable attributes: # duck stamp sales; # active waterfowl hunters (age classes, junior hunt licenses, etc); # days spent hunting; # families who hunt together (generations-tradition of hunting); # lost hunters; # recruited hunters; # of outreach events by agencies and attendance figures; # publically owned acres of wetlands; %age of citizens in favor of hunting; % of “satisfied” hunters; churn rate-use HIP stratification; dollars donated to conservation organizations; dollars spent on private land wetland work; economic surveys (FWS); goose season harvest (societal benefit); maintain 67% of current waterfowl hunter levels; membership in conservation organizations; non-toxic shot sales (size 4 or larger?); participation at waterfowl related events; PR dollars (allotments); \$ of waterfowl art sold; \$ of waterfowl hunting gear sold; total waterfowl harvest; visitor use at NWRs, etc.

Discussion: the TS felt that “maintaining traditions of waterfowl hunting” did not adequately reflect the full range of public values or benefits of waterfowl management. However, we also did not believe that the full range of benefits provided by wetlands and healthy landscapes should be a fundamental goal of waterfowl management.

Conclusion

One very important point that resonated throughout our TS discussions was that the scope of the NAWMP Revision has become too broad. We feel that it is critical to develop a framework for integrating multiple decisions that can assist us in better addressing the fundamental objectives of waterfowl management. We feel, however, that the integration of harvest and habitat management objectives should be at the forefront of this effort for the 2011/2012 Revision. While we agree that human dimensions (HD) are important to consider, we already implicitly factor human values into our harvest management decisions and to a lesser extent, the habitat management decisions we make. We feel that it is premature and technically uncertain how to more formally incorporate human dimensions into the process. The integration of harvest and habitat management objectives, if possible at all, is a technically challenging enough endeavor. This sentiment was echoed by the participants at the Minneapolis summit (who overwhelmingly supported immediate efforts to achieve better integration/coherence of harvest and habitat management, but more equivocally supported efforts to integrate harvest, habitat and human dimensions). The TS's reservations about launching a major new HD initiative for waterfowl management were reflected in Recommendation #5 from this meeting.

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