

**Central Flyway Waterfowl Technical Committee
Structured Decision Making Input
for the
North American Waterfowl Management Plan
December 9-10, 2009**

The Central Flyway Waterfowl Technical Committee (CFWTC) met in Socorro, New Mexico on 9-10 December 2009 to discuss and identify objectives related to waterfowl management as input into the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) revision. The CFWTC used a structured decision making (SDM) process to specify fundamental and means objectives and use them to formulate a proposed purpose statement for the revised NAWMP. The workshop started with an introduction about why this process was being used, the SDM process itself, and brief discussion about a timeline about when other similar workshops and revision of NAWMP was going to be completed.

The CFWTC first discussed the “trigger” and problem statement under which to identify objectives. A major concern or “trigger” for discussing waterfowl management objectives is the decline in the number of waterfowl hunters in the Central Flyway and nationally. This concern has been expressed previously by the CFWTC and the Central Flyway Council (Council).

Other factors that were considered a trigger were the upcoming revision of NAWMP and previous meetings (i.e., Minneapolis, MN, Aug 2008) and that the revised NAWMP would consider or attempt to integrate harvest and habitat management into a single framework or under one umbrella of waterfowl management. This elicited considerable discussion as to whether this should be done or not, and if so, the nature of the integration. Eventually, there was consensus that more ground work and communication was needed about this integration of waterfowl harvest and habitat management. Finally, the group recognized that most of these objectives were probably more aimed at duck rather than goose harvest management considerations.

The group then went through a list of potential waterfowl objectives that a smaller group of CFWTC and Council members initially went through in September 2009 in Cheyenne, WY. From this list, the CFWTC identified those as fundamental or means objectives. After all members ranked them, the group went through the list to reach consensus on those that should be fundamental or means. From this process, the CFWTC identified three fundamental objectives (see below). The group initially had identified two fundamental objectives: 1) Maintain or increase ecosystem goods and services; and 2) Maintaining waterfowl populations in North America for their intrinsic value. However, after some discussion about what those objectives may mean and what impact they would have on the NAWMP, they were relegated to means objectives or the language modified to fit under another means objectives. Three fundamental objectives were ultimately identified, and were labeled as the USE, HABITAT, and POPULATION objectives. Measurable attributes also were identified (on the second day) under those fundamental objectives. The CFWTC fundamental objectives were:

Fundamental Objectives:

USE Objective:

- Sustain or increase the current levels of waterfowl hunter participation under the North American model of wildlife conservation, perpetuate the diverse traditions of waterfowl hunting and provide for non-consumptive uses.

Measurable Attributes: Number of waterfowl hunters; species composition and spatial and temporal distribution of hunting; number of waterfowl hunters that identify themselves as “diver” hunters; visitation rates at NWR’s.

HABITAT Objective:

- Maintain or increase the quantity and quality of waterfowl habitats that are crucial to recruitment and survival throughout their annual life cycle to achieve waterfowl population objectives.

Measurable Attributes: Net landscape change (wetland/upland acres); nutrient reserves acquired by waterfowl, May Breeding Habitat and Population survey.

POPULATION Objective:

- Maintain all waterfowl populations at NAWMP objective levels and for those species without stated objectives, maintain populations at levels necessary to provide for hunting and non-consumptive uses.

Measurable Attributes: May BPop surveys, MWS or other pertinent surveys; proportion of species below NAWMP objectives.

Under those fundamental objectives, the CFWTC identified these as means objectives:

Means Objectives:

Pursue regulatory options for appropriate levels of harvest for all species.

Provide maximum hunting opportunity.

Minimize/eliminate closed and partial seasons.

Minimize the frequency of restrictive seasons.

Provide within-flyway regulatory options given hunter support and harvest-neutral outcome.

Maximize hunter satisfaction.

Maintain/establish simple, easy to understand and comply with hunting regulations.

Minimize annual regulation changes.

Restore the positive response of hunter participation as habitat, and waterfowl populations increase.

Increase hunter participation through communication, training and education efforts/programs.

Provide more public hunting opportunities.

Provide harvest opportunities that meet the needs/differences between states/flyways, with cooperation among jurisdictions (state, federal, flyway, partners, etc.).

Maintain or increase ecosystem functional quality resulting from waterfowl habitat conservation.

Minimize loss/degradation of wetlands and associated uplands.
Maintain/increase financial and political support for hunting and habitat conservation.
Promote conservation ethic in hunters and the public at large.
Increase support of non-consumptive users for waterfowl conservation.
Increase waterfowl habitat conservation by state and federal agencies and NGOs.
Increase federal/state agencies programs for habitat, access, research, management and monitoring.
Improve our understanding of waterfowl population dynamics and wetland (and associated uplands) ecosystems.
Insure cooperation among jurisdictions (state, flyway, partners, etc.).

The group then determined or discussed the hierarchies of means to fundamental objectives (see figure). There was strong consensus among the group that while the fundamental objectives are stated or listed separately, they are inextricably linked.

Given that this was for the revision of NAWMP, and with the list of fundamental and means objectives, the group then discussed and drafted a proposed purpose statement for NAWMP, based on the proposed statement that was presented at the Adaptive Harvest Management Working Group meeting in Portland, OR. The CFWTC's proposed statement, along with some basic premises in developing this statement was:

CFWTC's Proposed Purpose Statement of the NAWMP:

The purpose of the Plan is to sustain abundant waterfowl habitat to support waterfowl populations at levels that maintain waterfowl hunting and other uses. Progress toward Plan objectives will provide continued support for Plan activities and achieve broad benefits to biodiversity, ecosystem processes, and the people of North America.

- Waterfowl habitat, populations, and hunter objectives are inextricably linked. Success of the Plan requires maintaining this linkage.
- While much progress has been made, habitat and population objectives and goals in the original 1986 Plan and in subsequent updates have not been met.
- Hunting is a part of our heritage, and waterfowl hunters are an important, active supporter of achieving NAWMP goals. Waterfowl hunter numbers have been declining which may hinder support for Plan activities.
- For Plan goals to be met, broad public support for waterfowl and wetland conservation and hunting will be needed.
- Progress of the NAWMP have provided benefits to other species included in other plans, but to accomplish Plan goals, we must focus on waterfowl and waterfowl habitats. Focus on other species groups should be left to their respective plans.

To wrap up the workshop, the group did go through an example of the rest of the SDM process of determining strategic actions, filling out a consequence table, and determining a preferred alternative or decision. There was not sufficient time to go through this portion of the process in detail, as well as a lack of information/data to appropriately fill out a consequence table.

