Central Flyway Waterfowl Management Objectives
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Sept 21-22, 2009

On Sept. 21-22, several members of the Central Flyway Council (Council) and Central Flyway Waterfowl Technical Committee (CFWTC) met in Cheyenne, Wyoming to begin initial steps in indentifying future Central Flyway Council objectives in waterfowl management (see below). Attending the meeting for Council were John Emmerich (WY), Mike O'Meilia (OK), and Jeff Ver Steeg (CO). CFWTC members were Jim Gammonley (CO), Dave Morrison (TX), Larry Roberts (WY) and Mark Vrtiska (NE). John Runge, Colorado Division of Wildlife, also attended the meeting on Sept. 21.

The purpose of the meeting was to initiate discussion among the Council and CFWTC regarding flyway objectives for waterfowl management (primarily directed at duck management and duck harvest management). However, discussions and objective setting were also in preparation for the upcoming revision of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on migratory bird hunting, hunter recruitment and retention efforts and concerns, as well as other emerging issues. The group identified the following objectives/outcomes for the meeting:

- Identify initial fundamental and means objectives and potential measurable attributes for waterfowl (duck) management in the Central Flyway.
- Articulate/define strategic actions to meet objectives.
- Identify data needs or information gaps that would assist in selecting preferred alternatives.
- Identify next steps/actions to move forward with CF management objectives.
- Gain some experience with SDM and multiple objectives.

M. Vrtiska went through some background material on the premise of the meeting and a preliminary discussion of the Structured Decision Making (SDM) process. Briefly, the SDM process is a value-focused process whereby objectives (values) are discussed first which are then used to drive the rest of the decision and analysis. This is in contrast to intuitive decision-making, which usually jumps straight to the alternatives and weighing the options between them. The SDM process also breaks the problem down into components and makes the decision-making process explicit and transparent and can at least deal with possible different, multiple objectives. Finally, this process appears to be the method that will be used for the NAWMP revision.

The group went through the initial step in the SDM process which is to examine and determine the exact problem that needs to be solved or for which a decision needs to be made. Despite previous discussions at flyway meetings and the meeting in Minneapolis in August 2008, there was considerable discussion about the problem statement, i.e., whether there needs to be and the ramifications of coherence between harvest and habitat objectives. Additionally, there was some discussion that with the identification of the problem statement, if our potential solutions (objectives) and alternatives cover ducks, waterfowl, or all migratory game birds. The general consensus of the group was there needs to be more of a case made for coherence and

ramifications/potential outcomes of achieving or not achieving coherence. The consequences (cost) of coherence (in terms of the frequency of restrictive, moderate and liberal seasons) remains unclear. There is a perspective that coherence will not be used in a fashion that constrains harvest. However, there also is a perspective that the application of coherence will result in a harvest constraint (e.g., shoulder option) that will increase the frequency of restrictive seasons. This confusion needs to be addressed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The group recognized that despite the lack of a clear, definitive problem statement in relation to coherence, identifying/defining CF harvest or management objectives was still meaningful for other purposes.

The next step was outlining and identifying fundamental and means objectives. Fundamental objectives are those that constitute the broadest objectives directly influenced by decision alternatives. Means objectives are those that help or make progress toward fundamental objectives. A distinction can be made somewhat by asking the question of "why that's important, or why do you want that". You tend to reach fundamental objectives when the answer basically is "just because it's important".

The group used a list of objectives initially developed by the Mississippi Flyway (see attached) and discussed which ones were fundamental vs. means. Eventually, the group came up with this list of fundamental objectives:

- Sustain or increase the current levels of waterfowl hunter participation under the North American model of wildlife conservation.
- Maintain waterfowl populations in North America for their intrinsic value.
- Maintain or increase the ecosystem goods and services of waterfowl habitat.
- Increase support of non-consumptive users for waterfowl conservation.
- More public/political support for waterfowl hunting and habitat conservation.

The group discussed/felt that the remaining fundamental objectives could be means objectives for the first fundamental objective (sustain hunting), particularly the two fundamental objectives noted by an asterisk. That completed most of the first day, and M. Vrtiska and J. Gammonley then compiled (independently) a list of means that fell under each fundamental objective. Most of the discussion the next day was going through the objectives and first defining to some extent what was meant by the stated means objectives, whether or not they applied to more than one fundamental objective, or whether they should be rejected as an objective, because they were considered unimportant, redundant, or unclear.

The list of fundamental and means objectives were:

<u>Sustain or increase the current levels of waterfowl hunter participation under the North American model of wildlife conservation</u>.

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

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

Pursue regulatory options that minimize harvest of species of concern and are accepted by hunters.
Minimize the frequency of restrictive seasons.
Minimize/eliminate closed seasons.
Minimize/eliminate partial seasons.
Minimize hybrid seasons.
Minimize species-specific regulations.
Maintain/establish simple, easy to understand and comply with hunting regulations.
Minimize annual regulation changes.
Provide maximum hunting opportunity.
Provide maximum harvest opportunity (e.g., days, bag limit) to pursue abundant ducks (e.g., mallards).
Provide more public hunting opportunities.
Maximize hunter satisfaction.
Restore the positive response of hunter participation as habitat, and duck populations increase (e.g., as habitat/duck numbers increase, hunter numbers increase).
Perpetuate the diverse traditions of duck hunting.
Maintain all duck (waterfowl) populations at NAWMP goal levels (caveat: ensure NAWMP goals are appropriate).
Having sufficient habitat to provide maximum hunting opportunity.
Increase funding for federal/state agencies habitat, access, research, management and monitoring.
Increase hunter participation through education efforts.

Means Objectives rejected by group:
~~Provide equitable harvest opportunities among states/Flyways (Definition of equitable harvest needed or needs clarification)~~
~~Maximize harvest~~
~~Maximize harvest opportunity~~
~~Maintain season framework date extensions~~
~~Maintain/increase hunter numbers~~
~~Produce enough birds to satisfy hunters~~
~~Minimize chances of accidental violations~~
~~Provide reasonable opportunity for hunting~~
~~Maximize quality of hunting~~

<u>*More public/political support</u> .
Maintain political support for hunting
Provide non-consumptive uses for ducks/habitat
Improve communication with hunters
Improve communication with non-hunters
Increase support for waterfowl hunting by the general public
Maintain/increase hunter numbers

Promote conservation ethic in hunters and the public at large

Maintaining waterfowl populations in North America for their intrinsic value.

Increase quantity and quality of waterfowl habitats that are crucial to recruitment and survival throughout the annual life-cycle of waterfowl.
Increase funding/support for all duck friendly public programs and legislation (e.g., Farm Bill, NAWCA, Clean Water Act).
Increase habitat conservation efforts by NGOs.
Maintain/increase political & financial support for private habitat mgt efforts.
Improve our understanding of waterfowl population dynamics and wetland habitat (and associated uplands) ecosystems.
Insure cooperation among jurisdictions (state, flyway, partners, etc.).
Modify or eliminate habitat conservation that benefits only overabundant species/populations.
Promote conservation ethic in the public at large.
Insure that no species of waterfowl falls below necessary population levels for long-term viability.

Means Objectives rejected by group:
~~Increase duck survival, i.e., reduce natural mortality~~
~~Increase and improve duck breeding habitat~~
~~Increase and improve duck wintering habitat~~
~~Increase and improve duck migration habitat~~
~~Minimize costs for habitat development, restoration and management~~
~~Maintain duck populations as part of North American fauna~~
~~Increase duck populations at low levels so special regs are unneccessary~~
~~Maintain all duck populations at NAWMP goal levels~~
~~Increase understanding of biological mechanisms driving populations~~
~~Maintain quality habitat~~

Maintain or increase ecosystem goods and services.

Minimize loss and degradation of wetlands and associated uplands
Maintain duck populations as part of North American natural heritage.
Increase funding/support for all duck friendly public programs and legislation (e.g., Farm Bill, NAWCA, Clean Water Act).
Increase habitat conservation efforts by NGOs
Increase awareness/knowledge of the public and land managers to the benefits of wetlands (and associated uplands).

Means Objectives rejected by group:
~~Maintain/increase wetlands for ecological goods and services~~
~~Maintain quality habitat~~

*Increase support of non-consumptive users for waterfowl conservation.

Provide non-consumptive uses for ducks/habitat.
Improve communications with non-hunters.
Insure cooperation among jurisdictions (state, flyway, partners, etc.).
Maintain quality habitat.
Promote conservation ethic in the public at large.

Because time was limited, there was brief discussion about measurable attributes that could be coupled with these fundamental objectives. Nonetheless, the group recognized that this was an important step in identifying potential information/monitoring needs that would need to be put into place or enhanced to measure or gauge progress.

Again because of time limitations, M. Vrtiska went through the Miss. Flyway alternatives and consequence table for determining a preferred alternative. There was some discussion about applying relevant numbers to the different cells.

Next steps include write-up of meeting minutes, and providing the final minutes to other members of Council and CFWTC for review. It also was recommended to go through this process again with the rest of the CFWTC in December in Socorro and encourage other Council members (particularly Randy Kreil and Jeff Herbert) to attend that session. That will provide the CFWTC an opportunity to go through this process.

Currently, there will be a day slated at the 2010 North American on this issue (although a specific agenda for this day has not developed at this time). Obviously, a full Council meeting is not scheduled between now and the North American. Thus, another discussion item for the CFWTC December meeting will be a timeline or input on how to gather full Council input on Flyway objectives prior to the North American. Exact timelines on when the Central Flyway officially "rolls out" our stated objectives, or when they are melded with other flyways and joint ventures is not known at this time. It also may be helpful to have some discussion on when/how this may take place.