

16 September 2013

## Gulf Coast Joint Venture Waterfowl Working Group Comments on NAWMP Interim Integration Committee draft Work Plan

Members of the GCJV waterfowl working group include: Al Afton, Bart Ballard, Mike Brasher, Dan Collins, Brian Davis, Kevin Hartke, Dale James, Tommy Michot, and Larry Reynolds.

The GCJV Waterfowl Working Group convened a webinar/conference call to review and discuss the NAWMP IIC draft Work Plan. There was tacit support for the efforts of the IIC and continued progress toward implementing the NAWMP Revision recommendations. However, a general comment was offered that the timeline for developing and vetting revised NAWMP goals seems overly ambitious and perhaps impractical. The majority of our discussion centered on the straw-man objectives. The following are specific comments and concerns that were offered for consideration by the IIC and Objectives Task Group:

### Objectives for Waterfowl Populations

- The straw-man objectives for waterfowl populations, which were based on abundances observed 1997 – 2012, were not viewed as an improvement over the objectives of the 1986 Plan. Both represent arbitrarily selected periods which corresponded to population levels that are believed to have been desirable or otherwise satisfied societal demands of the waterfowl population.
- The focus of the NAWMP Revision was describing and promoting the value of an integrated waterfowl management enterprise. The subsequent Action Plan was viewed by some as a disappointment because it failed to suggest a suite of integrated objectives that were called for in the Revision. The working group was disappointed that the straw-man objectives offered in the IIC draft work plan similarly did not reflect tangible steps towards integrated objectives. As currently offered, the straw-man population objective seems to have been developed independent of explicit linkages to habitat or humans, with exception of acknowledging the influence of favorable environmental conditions and the extant habitat base on recent population levels. In other words, these do not feel new, inspirational, or revisionary.
- There was support for a less risk-averse harvest management philosophy, although skepticism was expressed about the willingness of the FWS to embrace such a shift in philosophy.
- There was support for giving additional thought to a ‘lower threshold’ approach for setting population objectives. One working group member specifically mentioned and agreed with comments provided by Jim Leafloor regarding how lower thresholds are used to manage some goose populations and that the merits of this approach for duck populations should be explored.

### Objectives for Waterfowl Supporters

- The goal of increasing waterfowl hunter numbers was consistent with efforts of Wildlife Departments of at least 2 states within the GCJV geography. One of these states had even established an objective of increasing hunter numbers by 10% over levels observed during a certain benchmark period.
- The IIC is urged to give greater consideration to expressing some human-related objectives on a percentage basis as opposed to absolute numbers. For example, we could achieve a hunter objective that is based on absolute numbers while experiencing a decline in hunter numbers as a percentage of the population. This approach may not be appropriate for all human-related objectives, but it should be strongly considered for some (e.g., conservation supporters, policy support, etc.).
- With specific regard to the straw-man hunter objective, there was some surprise that it didn't contain a demographic component considering that a demographic imbalance in our current hunter population is at least partly responsible for the observed and forthcoming declines in hunter numbers. This should be considered as revisions proceed.
- It was acknowledged that habitat conservation actions could indeed have impacts on waterfowl supporter populations, notably hunters. Of particular interest was the influence of spatial distribution of places to hunt on hunter mobility and frequency of participation.
- Given capacity limitations of the JV office and partnership, and existing challenges for delivering habitat conservation in support of biological objectives, there was some concern with further expanding JV responsibilities and priorities (i.e., to include objectives for resource users and conservation supporters), at least until additional resources become available.

### Objectives for Habitat

- The straw-man habitat objective was non-inspirational, although it was acknowledged that there was an attempt to at least acknowledge the need to ensure habitat objectives are consistent with (i.e., integrated with) population and people objectives. We are hopeful that significant improvements will be made as revisions proceed.
- Perhaps progress in developing truly integrated objectives is limited currently by continued lack of a framework within which integration could occur. Can we really establish integrated objectives without first identifying the framework within which that is to occur?