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Re: Comments from Playa Lakes Joint Venture on IIC work plan and 2012 NAWMP Action Plan

We would like to commend NAWMP and the Interim Integration Committee (IIC) for its great progress. While the work may feel glacial in speed, the change is certainly noticeable and appreciated by our Joint Venture. The waterfowl community is indeed paying attention to this Action Plan with a significant difference in the content and energy of conversations from the local to the continental scales.

We provide these comments but note as a Joint Venture our opinions have been frequently heard via our service to NAWMP. Mike Carter has served on the IIC as lead Joint Venture Coordinator also working with the JV liaison group to the IIC and Human Dimensions Working Group and more recently has been involved in a SDM workshop that may result in new integration related to FWS refuge acquisitions. Anne Bartuszevige is also serving on the Human Dimensions Working Group representing NSST and was one of the architects and principal organizers of the recently held NAWMP Integration meeting.

In January 2014, the Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) management board met and discussed the IIC work plan. They also heard some introductory information at our June 2013 meeting. Some broad themes came out in these discussions:

- The fundamental objective at PLJV is habitat conservation.
- We only pursue objectives associated with hunters, viewers and ecological goods and services (EG&S) as means objectives.
- The Joint Venture's role is potentially large in assisting partners who have some of our means objectives as their fundamental objectives.
- A continental population goal is required for Joint Venture work.

The PLJV management board recognized that integration among habitat, populations and users is novel, challenging, and necessary but struggled much like the continental conversation to nail down what it means. Members also recognized that the future desired work can't be funded entirely with current user groups. A parallel was drawn between the early 2000s when Joint Ventures took on an "all-bird" model and the energy associated with that change. We note that 10 years later the relevance of Joint Ventures seems to have increased, as well as funding levels, but not to the level expected or needed. We appreciate changes that increase relevance of leading initiatives such as NAWMP. Regarding relevance, we believe our work on EG&S is key to our Joint Venture's future success and urge NAWMP to continue investigating the opportunities associated with EG&S. The sooner the public understands "ducks = clean abundant water" the better.

Regarding population objectives, we see no challenge with having traditional population goals to which Joint Ventures tie their implementation plans and new population objectives that inform harvest and fuel hunter recruitment and retention. Joint Ventures need a population objective that is a stretch objective that provides for the vagaries of population cycles relative to breeding and

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winter habitat conditions. This means the table is always set within a Joint Venture and habitat redundancy exists among them. Further, for species such as Northern Pintail, it may even be desired to have a goal rooted in conservation of historic populations, say 1970s levels. We are comfortable with this mixed bag of population objectives (for harvest v. habitat and among species for habitat) and will be concerned if objectives are not forthcoming in the next year or two. In short, the national conversation to force one set of goals onto population folks and habitat managers seems to be stalled; we think more time should be spent considering how stretch goals for habitat and “shoulder strategy” for population management can be simultaneously accommodated. We view the objective for habitat as one rooted in ensuring habitat goals are developed to sustain wetlands and waterfowl (and hunting and viewing). And that harvest objectives function to ensure sustainable populations with a harvest that supports hunter recruitment and retention goals.

As to “local experiments” suggested by the plan committee, human dimensions work is already underway at PLJV. The importance of human dimensions was acknowledged by our Management Board to the point of endorsing our Joint Venture’s change to more regular and consistent use of the disciplines often listed under the umbrella of human dimensions. In summer 2013, as a follow-up to our 2006 landowner survey, DJ Case and Associates conducted 13 focus groups with farmers and ranchers in six states throughout the Playa Lakes region. The goal of this research was to better understand landowner attitudes and opinions about playa conservation (with emphasis on impediments to conservation behaviors) to inform our strategies to encourage and enhance conservation of playas on private lands. Based on the research results and recommendations, we have already started revamping our communications and outreach tools and strategies to make them more relevant to the producers in our region.

The consensus of the management board is that our fundamental objective is habitat conservation. To achieve our fundamental objective, we pursue many means objectives (keeping producers profitable, providing habitat for hunters and viewers, and sustaining the Ogallala Aquifer), but only as they drive habitat accomplishments. Each partner organization has different ways of reaching the habitat goal; thus we work and communicate with various constituencies based on their motivation with the end goal of providing habitat.

Thank you for your work.

PLJV Staff and Management Board