

## **Workshop Synthesis: *SWOT<sup>1</sup> analyses and Strategies to Advance Conservation***

*“Important actions were identified... but (it’s) not clear how compelling they are. Maybe it’s a matter of articulating them in a way that is compelling... that’s the challenge.”* [Workshop participant]

*“...I think the real test here will be how you are able to meld the information from all groups (breakout sessions) into a compilation of actions (what), goals (why), and steps forward (how).”* [Workshop participant]

*“Inspiration isn’t the right word. Concerned, engaged...those work in this context. I see a lot of work in the days ahead.”* [Workshop participant]

<sup>1</sup> SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

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## Background

This stand-alone synthesis section forms a major product arising from the **Future of Waterfowl II Workshop Report**. The objective of this synthesis is to summarize dominant ideas and key messages emerging from the workshop presentations and discussions. Much of the information contained here was obtained from workshop participants during facilitated break-out sessions that focused on the issues of “*Awareness and Public Engagement*” and “*Institutions and Integration*”. During those sessions, participants identified the strengths and weaknesses of their organizations, then identified opportunities and threats associated with “*Awareness and Public Engagement*” and “*Institutions and Integration*”, and finally, generated ideas about how to use our strengths and overcome our weaknesses to take advantage of opportunities and ward off threats. Additional information was generated from comments provided by individuals who responded to the post-workshop survey of participants.

Combined with other sources, this information will be used to help guide the development of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) 2018 Update and is expected to provide ideas for conservation initiatives over the next 3-5 years. We begin the synthesis with a review of Strategies for advancing NAWMP objectives, and, more broadly, wetland wildlife conservation goals. These strategies arise directly from participant ideas concerning the NAWMP conservation community’s perceived Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (hereinafter SWOT); the SWOT sections follow strategies.

Within each sub-heading for the SWOT analysis presented below, we summarize over-arching ideas pertaining to NAWMP (wetland-waterfowl conservation and management), broadly, as well as those related to the two workshop theme areas of *Awareness and Public Engagement*, and *Institutions and Integration*.

Quotes from workshop participants:

*“There was very open dialogue of engaging a broader community for conservation of wetlands.”*

*“I found the presentations/presenters and organizers to be very progressive but many of the participants were really attached to past or current approaches.”*

## **PART 1 - Strategies**

### **Ecological Goods and Services (EGS)**

*“... I think several useful and relevant ideas were offered. Not new ideas, necessarily, but I found it reinforcing that some efforts currently underway (e.g., with EGS) are seen by many to be realistic opportunities.”* [Workshop participant]

*“... I believe this is the route of the future BUT we need to have the right tools to deliver these messages while still being able to relate it back to waterfowl. We also can't lose sight of our primary goal of waterfowl habitat as these new opportunities pull us into areas we may not have worked before.”* [Workshop participant]

All of the breakout groups noted that the EGS delivered by waterfowl and wetland conservation give us excellent opportunities to show how our work benefits everyone. There were several good suggestions for taking advantage of those opportunities, including: (1) link waterfowl conservation and wetlands to human health and safety (e.g., clean water, flood protection) and sustainable agriculture and make this part of a central outreach and messaging strategy; (2) shift more science capacity to enhancing the understanding of waterfowl habitat protection and restoration on the provision of ecosystem services of importance to people, and having done that, use the results to communicate the value of conserving these ecosystems, argue for policy adjustments, seek additional funding, and solicit additional partners in conservation; (3) focus on building LOCAL coalitions to address local EGS issues, building on common values; and (4) use strong advocacy from NGOs to minimize threats of habitat loss and loss of funding through communicating and advocating EGS values.

### **Partnerships**

*“A key issue was the 'size of the tent' which will require some thought. Much discussion about expansion and broadening out the NAWMP mission balanced by concerns over mission drift and loss of focus on waterfowl and wetlands. I think that is possibly the turning point/pivot that needs to be considered very thoughtfully in the next update.”* [Workshop participant]

Use existing broad partnerships to recruit even more partners to our conservation efforts. Every group said this one way or another. Fewer groups considered HOW to do this. One group thought that engaging these stakeholders in a serious effort to review NAWMP objectives was needed to develop meaningful ownership in Plan actions by new partners. Another group suggested beginning by trying to build common values among key stakeholders. Still another group noted that engaging new stakeholders regionally in strategy development, networking or messaging may be effective. This conversation about HOW to engage new stakeholders seems very important. Suggestions included using corporate partners as

ambassadors for JVs to other corporations, broadening the participation of social scientists, and expanding the use of interdisciplinary teams.

### **Communication (internal, external) and Marketing**

Better communication about NAWMP initiatives, both with the public and internally within the professional waterfowl conservation community, was seen as important. Externally, key messages need to include EGS, the strong scientific basis for what we do, the breadth of Plan partnerships, and the positive contributions of hunters and others. Communication/marketing about NAWMP accomplishments and the Plan's continuing potential should be "persistent and aggressive," and we should use our diverse partnerships to help us connect with and educate a broad spectrum of politicians. When messaging to local audiences, we should focus on WHY Plan objectives and projects matter at local scales. We should use social media more frequently, especially to engage youth, and we should also partner with educational institutions to engage youth.

A related question was who would develop the key messages and at what scale? Who would deliver them? The Plan Committee's Public Engagement Team is seen as a body with much potential to help orchestrate international and national efforts that might logically be stepped-down to JV or State/Provincial scales. New partners and new technologies could help overcome our perceived communication deficits.

### **The Hunting Community and R3 Initiatives**

Considering hunting access and opportunities in conjunction with habitat development for birds was cited by many as a potentially important hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) strategy. Some felt that the potential for increasing hunting opportunity should weigh heavily on decisions about where to spend dedicated habitat money. However, others argued that although hunter R3 efforts are important, their potential is limited and efforts to increase participation should be expanded to all types of recreation. Such efforts may involve program development, access infrastructure at project sites, developing some projects in close proximity to population centres, multi-media marketing, connections with schools, and other strategies. New partners may be effective leaders of some of these efforts to connect people with nature, and such work may give those organizations more incentive to join NAWMP. One suggestion was a partner-based video channel that targets the local food movement, specifically to increase support for hunting; partners could include gardening, farming, hipster, healthy living communities. Some groups noted the need to subject these efforts to monitoring and assessment of efficacy.

### **Social Science (Human Dimensions)**

*“... (we) need to really dig deeply into what we really want from HD -- without getting distracted by people's ideas of what we should do. That part will come later.”* [Workshop participant]

Most groups noted the need for greater human dimensions (HD)/social science capacity. Specific ideas included hiring more staff with such expertise, more partnerships with university-based experts, cross-training staff educated in other disciplines, and helping design Bachelor-level Degree programs in social science of natural resource management. The new survey data and discrete choice experiment results should be thoroughly analyzed and hopefully will lead to new ideas about methods to engage the public in NAWMP habitat conservation. The HD Working Group is looked for ideas on follow-up testing of some of the emerging hypotheses and initiatives.

### **Funding/Resources**

*“Working lands conservation and seeking out new funding opportunities will be key relative to past reliance on traditional federal management agencies.”* [Workshop participant]

We should concentrate on developing new partnerships to compensate for inadequate funding, HD and communications staff, and other staff. This could include development and use of more citizen science. Several groups noted the need to continue developing and employing reliable decision-support models in order to accomplish as much as possible with limited staff and funds. A premium on efficiency and effectiveness was a common theme. Others described the need for increased “prioritization/triage” about how and where to invest limited funds and staff.

### **Engagement**

*“... we must specifically expand our engagement of private landowners. While there are many overlaps in these categories, landowners have a very different perspective than other citizens.”*

[Workshop participant]

Workshop participants offered several good suggestions for improving our engagement with partners, potential new partners, and the public in general. One was to engage both traditional and non-traditional stakeholders when developing strategies, perhaps by forming alternative governance structures such as co-management groups/councils that engage communities in decision-making. Other ideas included promoting use of public lands to improve people’s connection to nature; using conservation lands near population centers as a nexus for increased public engagement; advocating educational requirements in primary and/or secondary schools; employing professional marketing firms to reach/re-engage the public; engaging non-traditional

audiences to address nature deficit disorder (e.g., get birders to take kids birding); and using citizen science to focus engagement and consolidate support.

### **Science and Education**

Waterfowl management's grounding in science was identified as a major strength, but participants found room for improvement, especially with regard to using sound scientific information to ensure that conservation delivery is efficient and effective despite limited funding. Specific suggestions included more rapid adoption of new technology to enhance our science/data bases, conducting climate change scenario modeling to advise management (wetlands, waterfowl, population response), and using our ability to influence habitat at a local and regional level to mitigate wetland losses associated with urbanization. We should also work with universities for strengthening waterfowl-wetlands science education and for broader training of undergraduates in relevant cross-disciplines (social science, communications, economics, as well as the biological sciences).

### **Adaptability and Efficiency**

One breakout group suggested including reps of 5 new organizations (not previously involved) in future NAWMP updates. Others said we should improve prioritization to deal with declining funding levels, and improve prioritization and planning to minimize impacts of land use change. Also, all member/partner organizations should consider needs for specialists vs. generalists when hiring new personnel, and should promote cross-training.

### **Political Support**

We rely on diverse partnerships to balance political viewpoints (or perspectives) and garner broad-based support, so we could increase our political influence by expanding partnerships with non-traditional groups. One group thought we should be prepared for changing political priorities. Another recommended that we emphasize to partners and political leaders: (i) the importance of international cooperation for effective conservation and management of a migratory, multi-jurisdictional wildlife population and (ii) associated benefits (i.e., when appropriate, update NAWMP value proposition). In broad terms, be smart about positioning ourselves and influencing decision-makers; have messages that adapt NAWMP goals to align with current values.

### **Integration**

It was apparent from the breakout group discussions that "integration" means different things to different people; this is reflected by the diversity of recommendations regarding how to better integrate the habitat, populations, and people goals of the NAWMP Revision. (1) Expand

partnerships by being more inclusive with a broader suite of organizations and perspectives to advance integration of the NAWMP goals. And, use our diverse partnerships to get all stakeholders involved in defining objectives and then prioritizing/weighting them. In the same vein, (2) use NAWMP's recent HD survey results to develop methods of getting users and other interested members of the public involved in defining and prioritizing/weighting habitat delivery and harvest management objectives. (3) Use HD information to help guide where to restore habitat to benefit people and what types of habitats. For example, perhaps re-examine the scoring criteria for evaluation of NAWCA grants to ensure consideration of the recreational benefits of projects. (4) Develop model/pilot projects that integrate decision-making at a local scale that can be replicated with appropriate modifications. (5) Use our technical expertise to design robust monitoring programs(s) to measure defined metrics (EGS, biological, social/support) to gauge implementation success.

Some noted that we need to develop experience with optimization of actions toward achieving multiple objectives, whether this is *via* formal structured decision making [SDM] processes or some other means. Recognition of trade-offs, and learning about the effects of our choices through monitoring and assessment are essential. This should be done for various decision problems involving multiple objectives and at various scales.

### **Institutions**

Although there were few specific suggestions about adjusting the institutions governing waterfowl management, one novel idea was offered. Actively engage partners to explore institutional change and barriers to change by convening a “constitutional congress” (policy summit) with delegates from vested institutions. Those delegates would have authority to represent the vested institutions and make decisions about how to restructure and then move forward. While this suggestion may not be possible legally, the general point is that people want to be involved in what they consider to be vital discussions about the institutions of waterfowl management. This approach might be useful as a wide-ranging search for solutions.

Other recommendations were geared more toward using our current institutions more effectively. (1) Have existing partnerships (AFWA, JVs, Flyway Councils) work to increase institutional support for waterfowl and wetland management programs. For example, use the flyway system of state agency partnerships to connect state governments for both flood control and wetland conservation. (2) Use existing and new partners and increased innovation to leverage specialized skills and reduce organizational inefficiencies (knock down silos, reduce duplication of effort). (3) Use increased communication and improved messaging to break down cultural barriers and silos. (4) Identify and implement an appropriate decision-making process (e.g., SDM) among stakeholders. (5) Use technical expertise to develop alternative

models of prioritization and let these models "compete" in an adaptive management framework.

## **PART 2 – The NAWMP’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis summary)**

The most frequently cited strengths and weaknesses were common to both “*Awareness and Public Engagement*” and “*Institutions and Integration*”, whereas opportunities and threats were more specific to one or the other issue. The fact that strengths were widely acknowledged is an important foundation for the waterfowl community going forward.

### **Strengths**

- The strength inherent in NAWMP partnerships, including government agencies, NGOs, private landowners, hunters, policy advocates and more. These diverse partnerships occur at the continental scale, Flyways, as well as at the scale(s) of implementation.
- A strong basis for science in decision-making. Technical capabilities in research, GIS technology, monitoring capacity, ability and access to collect and analyse BIG data, and various approaches to adaptive management.
- Land conservation expertise, expressed in various ways. In habitat delivery, a connection to private lands conservation; plus, habitat influences at regional and local levels.
- Supportive constituents and stakeholders, particularly hunters, who have helped us obtain dedicated funding (although not sufficient, it is dedicated).

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of sufficient resources such as funding and people, especially lack of Social Science (human dimensions [HD]) expertise/capacity. In some agencies, declining support for waterfowl.
- Considerable inertia in organizations and institutions, making adaptation of processes and institutions more difficult. Failure to be adaptable.
- Relative weakness in communicating/marketing our work, both externally and internally. Poor communication with stakeholders.

Observation of the Workshop organizing team: Strengths outweigh weaknesses but we may not be taking full advantage of leveraging our strengths.

### **Opportunities**



### *Awareness and Public Engagement:*

- Ecological goods and services (EGS) as a societal deliverable. Incorporation of broader ecosystem services concepts in conservation planning, marketing and policy initiatives. Most people mentioned water quality and quantity as the most important opportunity, but other EGS values were noted too. People value these services – need to better quantify and communicate benefits.
- Opportunities for new and broader partnerships (groups/sectors we haven't worked with before), and new and diverse stakeholders to engage.
- Increasing ability to leverage social media. People saw opportunities in greater use of social media and other technological advances in communications to help market our messages to a broader public. Many of these ideas were expressed vaguely, however.

### *Institutions and Integration:*

- Broaden and diversify the partnership base, and to the extent possible align our goals with those of new partners. However, aligning our goals with new partners was also seen as a potential threat by many, who expressed concern about “mission creep” resulting from de-emphasizing waterfowl.
- Reach out to new audiences to expand our public constituency. Leverage the diversity of outdoor interests to increase public support.
- Seek untapped funding sources, but do the best with what we've got by being more innovative and efficient, both in program delivery and decision making.

## **Threats**

### *Awareness and Public Engagement:*

- Diminishing connections of people with nature, leading to a public that is often disinterested in conservation.
- Declining interest in waterfowl hunting.
- Continuing habitat loss.
- Climate change and associated risks to habitat.
- Limited or declining financial support.
- Public distrust in science. Political interference and instability, often accompanied by diminishing trust of science.

### *Institutions and Integration*

- Limited or declining capacity and insufficient funding.

- Conflicting values among stakeholders.
- Fear of change to structures and decision-making processes.
- Clash of internal (organizational) values resulting in fundamental disagreements.
- No agreed upon process for considering integration.

### **PART 3 - Some Bottom Lines**

It was evident that the passion for waterfowl conservation has not diminished; this bodes well for the future of waterfowl.

The EGS delivered by waterfowl and wetland conservation give us excellent opportunities to show how our work benefits everyone; effective messaging about this could help to engage support from more citizens in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

The waterfowl community has a remarkable history and capability in habitat conservation delivery – building on that demonstrated capability and record of success can be leveraged as we consider how to align waterfowl conservation with EGS values. We will, however, need to be careful not to appear to be simply reinventing the narrative – a change like this will need to be on purpose. In some cases it may be possible to remain focused on waterfowl population values and still engage others by quantifying the EGS values of those habitats without reallocating habitat investments. But if not, are we willing to address the possible / perceived tradeoffs with waterfowl population benefit?

Active participation by new partners in the implementation of the 2018 Update and development of future NAWMP updates could add to greater engagement, institutional buy-in, and possibly innovation.

There was a tension between a desire to increase the diversity of partners and stakeholders and a deep concern about losing focus on waterfowl as a result of that. The community will have to address and hopefully resolve this tension soon.

In a few instances, some perceived strengths were viewed by others as perceived weaknesses (e.g., ability to influence policy). This provides a signal that perhaps there is a need for better communication within the NAWMP community about ways of overcoming barriers that hamper attempts to influence policy, e.g., by communicating the steps involved in creating successful policy outcomes.

The community lacks adequate human dimensions capacity / expertise, and should take steps like hiring new staff with such expertise and providing existing staff with appropriate training to address this need.

Explicit processes (e.g., structured decision-making) for particular integration challenges could be very useful. The nature of these processes requires considerable technical commitment; however, as important (likely more important), leadership buy-in and active involvement is essential.

More innovative changes likely will challenge traditional institutions – this represents a cultural challenge that will need to be addressed.

Achieving all of the NAWMP goals will require different implementation strategies in different landscapes; thus, we should “think continentally, and integrate (implement) locally.”