

Migratory Bird

Joint Ventures

One morning, I walked up the stairs to the Sonoran Joint Venture office in Tucson, Arizona, and found that a friend had taped a newspaper clipping to my office door: “Joint venture will build special artillery missiles.”

I am a bird biologist. Neither I nor my organization builds artillery missiles, special or otherwise.

But my friend’s warped sense of humor raised a good point. “Joint venture” is a term that usually refers to a cooperative business enterprise. So, when people hear about the Intermountain West Joint Venture, sage-grouse habitat conservation is probably not the first thing that springs to mind.

Yet Migratory Bird Joint Ventures (JVs) are working across nearly every square mile of the U.S. and Canada—and, increasingly, much of Mexico—to help ensure that birds have the healthy habitats they need to flourish.

This year, 2012, marks their 25th anniversary.

Migratory Bird JVs are a network of regional partnerships of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, private landowners and citizens, corporations, tribes, businesses, and universities that conserve habitat to benefit birds, other wildlife, and people. JVs share a vision of a North American landscape where native birds thrive. They are based on the premise that human well-being depends on healthy land, water, and wildlife.

JV Roots

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the loss of wetland habitat seriously threatened waterfowl populations in North America. By 1985, waterfowl populations had plummeted to record lows. In 1986, the U.S. and Canada created the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) to encourage governments, private organizations, and individuals to work together through regional JVs to preserve and enhance waterfowl habitat.

25 Years of Conservation Partnerships

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The Migratory Bird Joint Ventures—“JVs” for short—are fundamentally about birds and the habitats they require. For example, San Francisco Bay JV partners have protected, restored, and enhanced nearly 70,000 acres of habitat for endangered California Clapper Rails (right) and other birds that depend on wetlands in one of the most heavily urbanized regions in North America. This article introduces us to the JVs and celebrates their quarter century of conservation successes.



*Santa Clara County, California;
November 2008. Photo by © Joe Fuhrman.*

San Mateo County, California; December 1992. Photo by © Larry Sansone.

The 2012 revision of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) encourages broad community support for waterfowl and wetlands conservation. This plan underscores the importance of *people* to the success of waterfowl management and aims to increase the number of waterfowl hunters, conservationists, and other citizens who enjoy wetlands and actively support wetland habitat protection.

The NAWMP engages the public, including the birding community, through the Joint Ventures, as well as other key partners. To learn more or get involved, read the 2012 revision online <nawmprevision.org>. Register to get updates on plan-revision milestones and other important achievements and opportunities, and lend your voice to the effort.

By 1994, 14 JVs had appeared on the landscape, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the prairie potholes of the Dakotas to the rolling grasslands and playa lakes of the southern Great Plains. The year 1994 also marked Mexico's signing of the NAWMP, completing the continental partnership for waterfowl conservation.

Between 1987 and 1994, JV partnerships purchased, restored, and enhanced more than two million acres of priority habitat for waterfowl and wetland conservation. And the birds responded. For the first time in 30 years, waterfowl populations began to stabilize, and, for some species, even showed signs of increasing.

Learn more about the major bird conservation initiatives in North America

North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)
fws.gov/birdhabitat/NAWMP/index.shtm

Partners In Flight—Landbirds
www.partnersinflight.org

U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan
fws.gov/shorebirdplan

Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan
tinyurl.com/CanadaSCP

Waterbird Conservation for the Americas
www.waterbirdconservation.org

North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI)
nabci.net

Gamebird Plans
tinyurl.com/GamebirdsPIF

In 1999, the Sonoran JV was born. It was the first international JV with Mexico, and set the stage for a rapidly expanding network of regional alliances in Mexico. JVs also began to expand their focus beyond ducks, adding landbirds, shorebirds, and colonial waterbirds, as well as gamebirds such as the Northern Bobwhite and the two sage-grouse species.

Today, 18 JVs conserve bird habitat in the U.S.; these include two U.S.–Mexico and one U.S.–Canada binational JVs. In Canada, four JVs cover the entire country from the

western boreal forest to the eastern Maritime provinces. In Mexico, JV-like *Regional Alliances* conserve critical areas like the cloud forests of Chiapas, the grasslands of the Chihuahuan Desert, the coastal wetlands and associated uplands of Marismas Nacionales in Sinaloa and Nayarit, the tropical forests and wetlands of the Yucatán Peninsula, and the pine–oak forests of the Sierra Madre Occidental. In addition, three international species-focused JVs are working to manage sea ducks, American Black Ducks, and several species of Arctic geese.

Over the past 25 years, JVs have involved thousands of partners to restore, protect, and improve 18.5 million acres of habitat for migratory birds, amphibians, fish, mammals, and plants. And JVs have become an international model for diverse partners working together to help conserve birds and habitat.

Conservation in Action

What do JVs mean for birders? Wherever you go birding, there is this reality: Without the habitats that birds rely on, birders would be out of luck. To learn more about some of the remarkable accomplishments of JVs across North America, read on!

The **Intermountain West JV** is restoring sage-grouse habitat and fostering sustainable ranching in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Sage-Grouse Initiative. Launched in May 2010, this initiative has already improved 1.3 million acres of sagebrush habitat through prescribed grazing and 100,000 acres of sagebrush through removal of encroaching junipers.

The **Playa Lakes JV** is helping to educate landowners about the value of seasonal wetlands, called playas. Thanks to partners like Ogallala Commons in Texas and the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, 482 acres of playas and buffers in the Texas Panhandle and more than 1,000 acres of playas in western Kansas are enrolled in conservation programs. These playas are home to more



The key to the JVs' successes is their myriad partners—representing numerous public and private interests in Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. These images depict the diverse work of the Sonoran JV. Upper left: Landowner Valer Austin talks with partners about riparian habitat restoration in southeastern Arizona and northern Mexico. Upper right: JV partners develop a plan for strategic communication and education in support of wetland conservation in Mexico's Natural Protected Areas. Lower left: JV partners survey bird populations in the Ciénega de Santa Clara in the Colorado River Delta. Lower right: Sonoran JV Coordinator Robert Mesta (background) discusses restoration work with Carlos Robles Elías (foreground), a rancher in northern Sonora. *All photos by © Jennie Duberstein.*

View a breathtaking five-minute video celebrating 25 years of the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, produced by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National JV Communications, Education, and Outreach Team, and with an introduction by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar: tinyurl.com/JV-Cornell

than 200 species of birds and other wildlife, and they help recharge the Ogallala Aquifer.

San Francisco Bay JV partners are restoring 16,500 acres of former salt ponds to a mix of managed ponds and natural tidal wetlands. These and other efforts in the Bay Area have protected, restored, and enhanced nearly 70,000 acres of wetland habitat that supports fish and other wildlife, including the resident endangered California Clapper Rail and more than 40% of the diving ducks that migrate and winter along the West Coast of the U.S.

Since 1991, **Pacific Coast JV** partners have helped the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service add more than 126,000 acres to National Wildlife Refuges in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, protecting sites for migratory birds such as Western Sandpipers, Dunlins, Black Brants, “Aleutian” Cackling Geese, and “Dusky” Canada Geese. They have also helped protect critical wetland sites in Hawaii for endangered birds like the Ae’o (Hawaiian Stilt), Koloa (Hawaiian Duck), Alae ke’oke’o (Hawaiian Coot), and ‘Alae’ula (the endemic subspecies of the Common Gallinule).

The **Sonoran** and **Rio Grande JVs** help support an

eight-state Regional Alliance for Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands Conservation, which aims to conserve the Chihuahuan Desert grasslands of northern Mexico. Conservation of this highly threatened ecosystem will have far-reaching positive impacts on migratory birds in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Key species include the Ferruginous Hawk, Aplomado Falcon, Sprague’s Pipit, and Chestnut-collared and McCown’s longspurs.

The **Central Hardwoods JV** is restoring shortleaf pine forests in Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. The goal is to improve habitat on more than 500,000 acres of pine-bluestem and pine-oak woodlands on public lands to help priority birds such as the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

Oaks and Prairies JV partners have identified tallgrass prairie remnants in 95 Texas counties and have targeted areas for conservation to help Northern Bobwhites, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Black-capped Vireos, Grasshopper Sparrows, Painted Buntings, and Eastern Meadowlarks.

The Appalachian Mountains JV is restoring and managing young forest, old field, and shrubland habitats to benefit the rapidly declining Golden-winged Warbler and other species, such as the American Woodcock and Prairie Warbler. In the George Washington and Jefferson national forests in Virginia, more than 1,700 acres of young forest habitat have been improved, while in Pennsylvania, 50 projects are enhancing habitat across more than 3,000

The Intermountain West JV has enhanced 1.3 million acres of sagebrush habitat—critical for the Greater Sage-Grouse—through prescribed grazing and elimination of invading junipers. *Lake County, Oregon; June 2008. Photo by © Joe Fuhrman.*





Some JVs span immense regions. The Pacific Coast JV protects everything from “Dusky” Canada Geese breeding in western Canada to endangered Ae’os (Hawaiian Stilts) in Hawaii.

Above: Colwood, British Columbia; October 2004.
Photo by © Jukka Jantunen-VIREO.

Right: Oahu, Hawaii; April 2011. Photo by © Bob Steele.

acres on 45 properties through the Working Lands for Wildlife and other U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Bill programs.

The **Sea Duck JV** is using satellite telemetry to document breeding ranges, migration patterns, and seasonal habitat use of scoters and Long-tailed Ducks in eastern North America, including the Great Lakes.

The **Atlantic Coast JV** has helped permanently protect about two million acres of working forest lands in the Atlantic Northern Forest. Support from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants program and the U.S.D.A. Forest Legacy Program helps birds such as Canada Warblers and American Black Ducks. NAWCA grants have also financed the protection and restoration of thousands of acres of Atlantic Coast saltmarsh habitat vital for Saltmarsh and Seaside sparrows and other bird species.

The **Prairie Habitat JV** recently purchased a 14-quarter section (2,240 acres) of predominately native prairie/wetlands in the Cypress Hills of southern Alberta, which is a Northern Pintail paradise (the



Buy a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (the “Duck Stamp”)—and a Junior Duck Stamp! They aren’t just for hunters. Ninety-eight cents out of every dollar generated by sales of the stamp goes directly to the purchase or lease of wetland habitat for protection in the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System. A stamp gets you access to all refuges. Learn more online: fws.gov/duckstamps • friendsofthestamp.org



bird populations. More than 30% of bird species in the U.S. are federally listed as endangered, threatened, or of conservation concern. With pressure from human population growth, demand for economic and energy development, competition for limited natural and financial resources, and the uncertainty over climate change, the JVs’ work is more important than ever.

You don’t have to be a biologist or even a landowner to join a JV partnership. Anyone is welcome. Take a look at the special insert in this issue of *Birding* (attached here) and find the JVs in your area.

Visit their websites. Contact them and find out how you can get involved. The secret to the JVs’ success is their network of partners. Everyone can help.

And one thing is certain: I’d rather have a future with JVs that work to conserve birds and habitats than one with JVs that build special artillery missiles.

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area supports 12–15 breeding pairs per square mile), and provides excellent staging and breeding habitat for a variety of waterfowl and grassland species.

Located east of Ottawa, Ontario, the Atocas Bay conservation project is an excellent example of how **Eastern Habitat JV** partners have permanently secured almost 2,000 acres of wildlife habitat. This demonstration project has restored nearly 250 wetlands throughout the landscape. At the same time, management and enhancement of upland grassland communities have provided resources to sustain healthy populations of such at-risk species as the Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, and Short-eared Owl. The Atocas Bay project proves that agriculture and wildlife conservation can go hand in hand.

JVs and ABA Members

Despite the many successes of Migratory Bird JVs over the past 25 years, it’s an uphill battle to protect native

In the first and final analysis, the JVs are all about habitat. One of the most intensively altered landscapes on Earth is the coastal plain of the northeastern U.S., where the Atlantic Coast JV is working to protect such habitats as back bay coastal salt marshes (depicted here) and upland mixed hardwood–conifer forests. *Photo by © Kevin T. Karlson.*





JVs employ state-of-the-art technology to protect bird populations. For example, the Sea Duck JV uses satellite telemetry to document movements of Long-tailed Ducks on the Great Lakes and elsewhere. *Toronto, Ontario; January 2010. Photo by © Mathew Studebaker.*



In much of their range, nesting Prairie Warblers require restoration and management of a mosaic of young forests, old fields, and shrublands. The Appalachian Mountains JV is protecting and enhancing such habitats. *Scioto County, Ohio; April 2010. Photo by © Bob Royse.*