**Joint Ventures: Celebrating 25 Years of Bird Habitat Conservation**

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**Word count: 1,586 (not including examples from specific JVs)**

*What Do Joint Ventures Do for Birds?*

“Joint venture” is a term most commonly used to describe a cooperative business enterprise. However, wildlife conservationists adopted the term in the late 1980s to describe the public-private partnerships that would be needed to implement waterfowl conservation across the continent with the signing of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan in 1986.

Today, these Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, or “JVs,” are collaborative, regional partnerships of government agencies, non-profit organizations, corporations, tribes, academia, and individuals that conserve habitat for priority bird species within specific geographic areas in the United States and Canada. JVs share a vision of a landscape where native birds thrive, and believe that human well-being depends on healthy lands, waters, and wildlife. By bringing together diverse partners, joint ventures protect the landscapes that birds -- and people -- rely on for survival.

This year, 2012, the Joint Ventures celebrate 25 years of bird habitat conservation.

Joint Ventures bring partners together to protect and restore landscapes that support healthy bird populations, sustain livelihoods, and provide nature’s benefits to people and wildlife. JVs use state-of-the-art science to ensure that diverse habitats are available for birds and other wildlife.

Their actions include biological planning, conservation design and prioritization; project development and implementation; monitoring, evaluation, and applied research; communications, education and outreach; and funding support for projects and other activities. These actions form an iterative cycle known as strategic habitat conservation (SHC).

SHC is a science-driven framework for making management decisions about where and how to deliver conservation efficiently to achieve specific biological outcomes. It is a way of thinking and doing business that requires us to set specific biological goals, allows us to make strategic decisions about our work, and encourages us to constantly reassess and improve our actions -- ensuring that habitat conservation is strategic, efficient, and adaptive.

*[Insert specific reference to your JV: one to three sentences including your name, geographic location, habitat types, and focal species.]*

Effective, collaborative conservation for birds is needed now more than ever. More than 30 percent of bird species in the United States are federally listed as endangered, threatened, or of conservation concern. Their greatest threat is habitat loss on breeding areas, overwintering grounds, and migration sites throughout North America and beyond. The work of the JVs is critical to protecting and restoring populations and habitats of North America's birds through partnerships guided by sound science and effective management.

*How did JVs Evolve?*

Joint Ventures were born out of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), a landmark agreement signed in 1986 by the U.S. and Canadian governments to restore continental waterfowl populations to the levels of the 1970s.

In 1985, North American waterfowl populations had plummeted to record lows. Historical data indicated that since the first settlers arrived in the continental United States, 53 percent of the original 221 million wetland acres had been destroyed. The picture was the same across Canada, where wetland losses across settled areas range from 29 to 71 percent.

The NAWMP’s framers realized that the two federal governments alone could not halt the decline, and that the only viable option was to encourage a network of regionally based, self-directed partnerships committed to strategic waterfowl habitat conservation. These public-private partnerships were needed to leverage science-based planning and ensure that on-the-ground habitat conservation would happen at unprecedented levels.

As such, JVs were initially waterfowl conservation partnerships. The first six JVs were located in portions of North America—the Prairie Pothole Region of the United States and Canada; the Central Valley of California; and the Lower Mississippi Valley, Gulf Coast, Atlantic Coast and Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Basin—designated as the highest priority habitats of concern for waterfowl.

The U.S. and Canadian governments provided encouragement and seed funding, but the real work was done by the regional partnerships. They formed management boards, developed governance procedures, and collectively sought funding for priority work. In 1994, Mexico became a signatory to the NAWMP, completing the continental partnership for waterfowl; though it would take at least another decade for JV-like partnerships in Mexico—regional alliances—to begin to form.

Conservationists concerned with the plight of other migratory bird groups—landbirds, shorebirds, and colonial waterbirds—saw the success of the NAWMP’s Joint Venture model and adopted it as they developed conservation plans and strategies for their species of concern. This spawned development of new JVs and expansion of existing ones. Today, a virtually seamless network of JVs exists across the United States, as well as portions of Canada and Mexico.

Most of the JV management boards now work under the guidance of national and international bird conservation plans to design and implement landscape-scale conservation efforts for all birds, including resident game species. To provide a consistent framework for these activities, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative developed Bird Conservation Regions, which are used not only by JVs, but also by state-level bird initiatives and other agencies and organizations.

*[Include one to three sentences about your JV and its priorities.]*

*How Do JVs Work?*

Joint venture partnerships are supported with base funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Canadian Wildlife Service, and a vast array of additional federal, state, and private funds. For JVs with approved implementation plans, FWS has committed to seek funding for a coordinator and establish base capacity for planning, implementation, and evaluation—the main components of SHC.

Nationwide, 18 habitat-based JVs address bird habitat conservation issues within their geographic areas. Additionally, three species-focused JVs—all with an international scope—work to further the scientific understanding needed to effectively manage sea ducks, American black duck and Arctic geese.

In Canada, four JVs cover the entire country from the western boreal forest to the Eastern maritime provinces.

A common misconception of JVs is that because they are supported by federal funding, they are a grants program or a branch of the federal government. In fact, JVs occupy unique territory in that their appropriated federal funding and activities are governed by self-directed management boards comprising representatives of participating agencies, organizations, corporations, and individuals.

Management boards are responsible for sustaining the commitments of representative organizations, which is critical to achieving JV goals and objectives and determining priorities for all aspects of JV activities. The composition of management boards varies among JVs and can be diverse.

For example, the Intermountain West JV Management Board includes state and federal agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, and for-profit corporations. The Rainwater Basin JV Management Board includes farmers and other private landowners. These organizations and individuals bring valuable non-federal dollars to leverage federal dollars for habitat projects, conservation planning, and other JV priorities. The relationship is mutually beneficial: the JV forum helps organizations build partnerships for habitat conservation and gain support for key initiatives.

*[Include one to three sentences about the specific partners and operations of your JV.]*

Joint Ventures have been widely accepted as the model for conservation in the 21st century. The U.S. Congress has strongly supported the work of JVs over the last 20 years. Funding has increased steadily during this period.

This is not surprising—JVs have a 25-year history of success in leveraging public and private resources by bringing together partners to focus on regional conservation needs. Over the course of their history, JV partnerships have leveraged every dollar of Congressional appropriations 35:1, helping to conserve millions of acres of habitat.

JVs range in size from San Francisco Bay -- the smallest, but protecting one of the Pacific Flyway’s largest migratory bird stopovers -- to Intermountain West, which at 486 million acres spans 11 states. Most established JVs maintain a staff devoted to coordinating the JV partnership, providing scientific and geospatial expertise, and undertaking communications, education, and outreach.

In some cases, JVs administer grants for capacity-building, research and monitoring, or direct habitat projects. Joint Venture funds are often used to support the work of partner organizations that leverage funding for habitat work through, for example, Farm Bill conservation programs or other federal, state, and private sources. Several JVs have stepped up to contribute seed money to new positions in priority landscapes, as defined by their science-based bird conservation planning.

JVs are partnerships that operate under the old adage—*the partnership is stronger than the sum of its parts*.

An investment in JVs is an investment in natural resources and our future. JVs protect and restore habitats for birds and other wildlife, providing natural areas where children and families can get outside and connect with their natural world. JVs also work with hunters, anglers, birders and other outdoor enthusiasts to provide the habitats they need to enjoy their favorite pastimes.

Habitats conserved by JVs are not only home to millions of birds, but also provide vital ecological services, including enhancing water quality, contribute to flood control, buffering coastal erosion, recharging ground water and promoting carbon sequestration. In this way, JVs help protect the quality and safety of our environment and assess and reduce the impacts of climate change.

*[Include an example of a project from your JV – two to four sentences.]*

While waterfowl and wetland conservation will always be critical to most JV missions, the expanded scope of JVs fits well with the locally based habitat work of many partners—those that work not just to conserve wetlands, but also forests, grasslands, coastal and marine environments, and chaparral and desert ecosystems.

Indeed, JVs provide an excellent forum to advance the bird and habitat objectives of a wide variety of agencies and organizations across the country, benefitting a host of other wildlife species and people, as well.