

ANNEX 2

NORTH AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE Guiding Principles

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:

Birds constitute a readily recognized component of the biological diversity of North America. More than 1,100 species are found in Mexico, 700 in the United States and 600 in Canada. Hundreds of these species are shared among all three nations and many are endemic to North America.

Birds are important natural resources for ecological, economic, and aesthetic reasons. From insect pest control, to plant pollination and seed dispersal, to critical links in the food web, birds are an integral part of dynamic ecosystems. These functions prevent hundreds of millions of dollars in economic losses in agricultural and forest products industries each year. In addition, birds are one of the greatest ecotourism attractions in North America, resulting in billions of dollars of contributions to local and national economies by birdwatchers, hunters, photographers, and others. Birds are also culturally important; for example hummingbirds are representations of the god of fertility in most of the Mexican cultures.

Preserving a natural diversity of birds is a major challenge in the face of human-induced environmental change. Many

North American birds are in decline, with several hundred species designated as vulnerable. Many other species still considered common are undergoing widespread population declines.

The responsibility to ensure the long-term well-being of our entire avifauna must be addressed through restoration and maintenance of ecosystem balance.

Efforts for the protection of birds and their habitats are being carried out in each country, but significant gaps still exist and many bird populations continue to decline. Without greater coordination, the combined effectiveness of existing programs is not assured and economies of scale are not achieved.

Without some of the new efforts that could be spawned through the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, ultimate success will not be achieved.

Current conservation projects target the habitat and other needs of specific groups of species, such as waterfowl, shorebirds, colonial waterbirds, migratory and resident land birds, and various endemic and endangered species. Some integration among these programs is underway, but there remains room for improvement. International cooperation for bird conservation has begun, but much more needs to be done. Conservation is rarely considered from an ecosystem perspective. And, most importantly, none of the existing programs has the financial resources necessary to implement needs identified in planning activities and achieve full suites of conservation goals.

THE INITIATIVE:

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative addresses these issues. It is a statement of principles and approaches shared by individuals, organizations, agencies, companies, and programs working for the conservation of birds and their habitats in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. It is intended to articulate efforts and help individuals, organizations, companies, and programs become more effective without reducing their independence or identity. The initiative recognizes, respects, and will not infringe upon multiple jurisdictions and mandates regarding bird conservation at various levels of government, in

international treaties, in multi-partnership endeavors, and in numerous private organizations. The initiative will be a basis for interaction among these groups across international, taxonomic, and jurisdictional boundaries. Agreement on shared principles and approaches will initiate more extensive dialogue and action to achieve more effective bird conservation. This Initiative is not a formal treaty nor will it replace in actuality or spirit any existing agreement. It arose out of a directive of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, but will be the property of all those who contribute to it. Its ultimate value will depend on the commitment of its participants.

GOAL:

To ensure the long-term health of populations of native North American birds by increasing the effectiveness of existing and new initiatives, enhancing coordination, and fostering greater cooperation among the nations and peoples of the continent.

PREMISES:

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) recognizes that:

- many bird species occupy broad geographic ranges;
- an individual species may require diverse habitat types to complete its annual cycle;
- annual cycles often extend across international boundaries; and
- many birds with diverse life histories and ecological requirements co-occur within single habitat types.
- social and political conditions in the three countries change, affecting the nature of conservation efforts;
- an integrated Initiative encourages coordinated bird conservation actions;
- existing efforts are important and should not be compromised; and
- effective continental bird conservation requires additional resources.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES:

Participants in the Initiative agree to the following:

This Initiative includes Mexico, Canada, and the US, but, because the needs of many birds extend beyond these countries, linkages with other nations will be encouraged.

The Initiative will strive to facilitate international cooperation based on shared species, habitat types, ecosystems, management issues, conservation philosophy, and the common need for additional resources.

Nations participating in this Initiative will share common objectives, and recognizing the diverse social and conservation realities between and within nations, will promote bird conservation in a manner that is compatible with national and local conditions, capabilities, and needs.

The Initiative will build and strengthen diverse and multiple linkages among public agencies, private organizations, landowners, and individuals within and among the three countries.

The Initiative will address all species of native birds of North America.

Conservation objectives will include maintaining population levels of common native birds, and recovery of species in danger of extinction.

Populations and subspecies that are genetically distinct should be treated as separate conservation units where appropriate.

The Initiative will focus on conservation of biological diversity at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels.

This Initiative will be dynamic and adaptive; participation and consensus among stakeholders will guide decisions and actions.

The Initiative will be based on the best information available, including scientific and traditional knowledge. In cases of uncertainty, options will be selected that are judged to be most beneficial to bird conservation.

Bird conservation efforts should include a broad array of options with primary emphasis on voluntary stewardship approaches.

The Initiative will promote sustainable land use (both traditional and modern) and management practices that are compatible with bird conservation.

Bird conservation objectives should be incorporated into existing natural resource practices or programs wherever possible.

PROPOSED ELEMENTS OF THE BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Each of the following twelve elements includes a set of strategies. The number and sequence of elements and strategies and the relative emphasis among them will vary among programs and participants.

I. Development

I. 1. Infrastructure and Institutional Support

Background -

Existing initiatives, agencies, and organizations already make significant contributions to bird conservation, but the ambitious objectives of this Initiative require a new synergy among them to ensure success. Currently, there is no forum through which such synergy can develop, and therefore this Initiative must create an infrastructure of capable individuals, institutional commitment, and dedicated resources to advance its objectives.

Strategies -

Although autonomous, the Initiative will seek endorsement from appropriate international and national institutions, in particular the Trilateral Agreement for Wildlife, Plants and Ecosystem Conservation and Management and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. It is hoped that, thereafter, the CEC will continue support of NABCI through facilitation and some funding.

The Initiative will be governed by a Tri-National Steering Committee, initially consisting of three representatives from each country to be selected by the National Committees. The role of this committee will be to guide and advance the strategic vision of NABCI.

Each nation will have a National Committee for NABCI, with composition determined independently in each nation, that will: prepare national strategies; foster Initiative objectives; serve as a forum for communication among initiatives, organizations, and individuals within each nation; and nominate representatives to the Tri-National Steering Committee.

Each nation will hire at least one National Coordinator for NABCI. This individual will act as staff for the National Committee and will advocate advancement of the NABCI wherever appropriate.

I. 2. Bird Conservation Regions

Background -

A common spatial language in which ecological phenomena play a stronger role than political boundaries will facilitate communication for bird conservation. There is currently an abundance of mapping systems for conservation purposes, among which efforts to reconcile differences have been minimal. Communication across international borders within ecoregions is particularly insufficient.

Although the effectiveness of planning, implementation, and evaluation is greatly enhanced through use of a single mapping system, not all bird conservation actions occur at the same geographic scale. A nested hierarchy of ecologically-defined geographic units optimizes geographic arrangements for bird conservation. Nevertheless, many actions will still be taken on the basis of political boundaries.

Strategies -

Participants in the Initiative in all three countries adopt the hierarchical mapping system of the CEC for bird conservation planning, implementation, and evaluation purposes.

Bird Conservation Regions within and among the three nations will be defined using the CEC maps. Boundaries will be based on aggregations of geographic units deemed reflective of bird distribution and conservation issues. Participants in the Initiative will encourage adoption of the Bird Conservation Region concept and maps.

I. 3. Priority species

Background -

An important first step in a conservation program is in differentiating those organisms or phenomena for which conservation action is most warranted from those for which it is least warranted. Yet this step, and the reasoning behind it, often are not adequately addressed or are applied inconsistently across space and time. Existing lists of priority species (endangered lists, Natural Heritage Program/Conservation Data Center ranks, Birds of Management Concern, sensitive species lists, etc.) are worthy attempts to overcome this problem. However, they tend to generalize across taxa and often do not take into account important factors of bird biology such as diffuse distribution across large ranges, extensive seasonal movements, pronounced differences in habitat use and diet at different seasons, and a reliance in some species on relatively few critical areas for parts of the life cycle. Also, not all lists satisfactorily balance biological priorities with political forces. Partners in Flight in the United States, Partners in Flight-Canada, and CIPAMEX through the Important Bird Areas program in Mexico have developed similar prioritization processes in hope of overcoming these shortcomings.

It is probably unreasonable to assume that a single prioritization system will be embraced by all advocates of bird conservation. However, for bird conservation efforts to be credible and compelling, priorities, and the rationale behind them, must be clearly stated and broadly evaluated. Emphasis will be

placed on using and reconciling already existing and established prioritization systems at global, national, and local levels. Three distinct factors must be considered and integrated during the complex process of determining priorities among bird species: 1) extinction of species (or subspecies or distinct populations) must be prevented and, to the best of our ability, the evolutionary future of genetic units should be protected; 2) common birds should remain common in order to provide ecological, economic, and aesthetic values, and the responsibility for their maintenance should be recognized where appropriate; 3) populations of many wild birds that provide direct benefits to people as sport or food species or as part of traditional practices should remain sufficiently robust to support sustainable use.

Strategies -

Prioritize species based on: factors affecting survival including range size, population size and trend, threats, and an area's importance to the welfare of each species; jurisdictional responsibility and the economic and ecological values that the birds provide; and traditional uses and recreational value, particularly for game species. Expert opinion should be relied upon where data are lacking; sources of information should always be recorded.

Integrate priority species into suites of species for which a planning unit has conservation responsibilities.

Determine priorities at different geographic scales (continental, national, planning unit, local), using standardized or comparable methods among scales and across international boundaries whenever possible.

Expand key prioritization databases to include all bird species in all parts of their annual cycles. Create digital maps of the ranges and seasonal movements of all North American birds.

Base prioritization on the best monitoring data available. Rankings should be adjustable on the basis of changing status or improved knowledge.

I. 4. Habitat needs and priorities

Background -

Factors that warrant conservation action, and the actions to ameliorate them, must be understood. Although past studies provide considerable insight into the biology of many birds, the causes and cures for poor population health are often not well known. However, while we seek to improve understanding, we must also recommend actions based on current knowledge. This requires assimilation and interpretation of information, identifying assumptions behind recommendations, and applying resources toward solutions.

Strategies -

Describe the habitat requirements and associations of each priority bird to the extent possible; include the characteristics and quantity of habitat needed as well as the landscapes in which suitable habitat occurs.

Assess habitat qualities on the basis of demographic parameters (reproductive success, survivorship) in addition to density or presence-absence or abundance data whenever possible. Means of efficiently acquiring demographic data must be developed.

Identify species suites by habitat type that presumably respond similarly to conditions and management actions to simplify the conservation planning process.

Critically assess the response of priority species to management and land use practices.

Work toward agreement on habitat classification and/or compatibility among classification schemes.

Promote development of habitat monitoring and assessment capability. Track the status and trends of important habitat types in all planning units. Correlate remotely sensed habitat data with locally collected vegetation data, and assess the relevance of this information to bird distribution and population status.

I. 5. Population objectives and habitat strategies

Background-

Current efforts are often ad hoc, poorly focused, and opportunity-driven. Objectives often are set for single species, species groups, or habitat conditions independent of the overall context of the planning unit. No matter how much we do, we are unable to assess our efforts if the components of success are undefined or very local. Opportunities to achieve broader conservation goals will increase if we have well-developed objectives. This Initiative does not intend to supplant objectives that have been carefully set by bird conservation programs, but rather to encourage such a process where it does not now exist and to integrate objectives, where appropriate, across taxa within a habitat or planning unit.

The goal for most birds or species suites will be stable or increased populations, but, for some species that now occur in higher numbers or densities than desired, objectives may include reduction of some populations. Examples might include some goose species, brood parasites, and introduced birds.

Strategies -

Base objectives on an understanding of the current status of habitats and populations; evaluate the quantity, spatial arrangement, and quality of targeted habitats and the status of priority bird species and species suites in targeted and other habitat types.

Establish population objectives to maintain the social, economic, and environmental values provided and to ensure long-term population viability.

Set conservation objectives in terms of populations (such as percentage change from current conditions, total numbers of individuals or pairs, number of discrete populations, population trends or health, or some historical level). Strategies to achieve objectives can be phrased in terms of habitat (such as total quantity and quality of habitat, or numbers and distribution of blocks of satisfactory habitat). In many situations, target areas within a planning unit can shift over time in response to environmental variation, succession, disturbance, or management.

Set objectives simultaneously at different geographic scales (continental, national, planning unit). Establish linkage among these scales.

II. Application

II. 1. Context: Landscapes and Ecosystems

Background -

Bird population objectives and habitat strategies must be formulated within the context of, and be a component of, visions and actions for landscapes and ecosystems. Environmental and land management mandates increasingly focus on biological diversity. Furthermore, land managers and agencies must conduct management practices for a wider focus than birds. Birds, however, can be appropriate tools for consideration of larger biodiversity issues. They occur in virtually all habitats, are, as a group of species, general in use of those habitats, and more is known about their ecological needs than of many other organisms. Nevertheless, there are conflicts among objectives for different bird taxa and conflicts between conservation of birds and other groups of organisms that need to be resolved.

Within any habitat type, it can be assumed that the area required to support healthy populations of the most area-demanding bird species will also meet area requirements of most other organisms, with the notable exception of some large, wide-ranging mammals. This assumption should be examined in all situations. Within an area assumed to be sufficient in size and characteristics for a bird species suite, there will often be other organisms of conservation concern with differing or more exacting habitat requirements.

Habitat types and conditions interact within an ecosystem through succession, material and energy flow, and management practices. Plans for bird conservation should be of sufficient geographic scale and should account for these spatial and temporal dynamics.

Most of the ecosystems in which bird conservation will occur have been and will continue to be heavily influenced by human activities. Bird conservation objectives will only be realistically achievable if they are integrated with socioeconomic demands on land.

Strategies -

Resolve, to the extent possible, conflicts in distribution, quantity, and/or condition among habitat types

needed to maintain populations of birds for which a planning unit has significant responsibility.

Link with data on other elements of biodiversity and social phenomena to resolve major discrepancies and conflicts involving the use of birds and bird habitat as conservation planning tools.

II. 2. Conservation actions

Background -

Conservation actions are needed wherever objectives exceed actual conditions. Even where conditions meet or exceed objectives, conservation action will generally be necessary to maintain those conditions. A tremendous amount of conservation action and management of habitat for wildlife has occurred in North America. However, this activity has not been sufficient to guarantee the long-term health of the continent's avifauna.

There is considerable geographic variation in conservation history and potential, both within and among nations. Effective conservation action must be rooted in awareness of the unique historical, social, economic, political, and biological characteristics of each country. Differences in the nature of protected areas, sustainable use of natural resources, and patterns of land occupancy and tenure must be recognized. Efforts to achieve bird conservation objectives should be undertaken with respect for landowner objectives, social needs, and sustainability.

Active management will be necessary to retain existing or improve inadequate conditions for bird. Management can affect 1) predation and brood parasitism; 2) hydrology; 3) priority birds through direct manipulation (captive rearing, etc.) and treatment of key microhabitat features (nesting sites, etc.); 4) food resources; and, most importantly, 5) vegetation structure and composition through influence on succession, disturbance, or land use practices.

Bird conservation actions should be coordinated and, where possible, integrated with other natural resource planning/management processes such as watershed and/or estuary management and sustainable development projects. In this manner, bird conservation benefits from the institutional and financial resources and the political support of these related efforts.

Strategies -

Restore, enhance, acquire, or otherwise protect the quantity, quality, distribution, and security of habitat specified in bird conservation plans.

Develop means by which bird conservation objectives can be achieved in the context of common land use practices, including agricultural and forestry activities.

Complete identification of Important Bird Areas throughout North America and apply results to conservation efforts in ecoregions in which they are most useful.

Reduce sources of direct bird mortality, where feasible, inasmuch as these sources are strongly suspected to have negative impacts on bird populations. Sources could include pesticides and other specific sources and practices that appear to significantly increase mortality (i.e., lighted buildings during migration, towers, feral house cats, seabird by-catch in commercial fisheries, power lines).

Develop effective and acceptable methods for reducing populations of birds whose overabundance impairs ecosystem function.

Recognizing that information available for the design of management actions is invariably incomplete, incorporate research and monitoring components into conservation plans in order to assess assumptions and the consequences of actions, and allow for modification of recommendations if required.

III. Monitoring and Research

III. 1. Broad-scale Monitoring

Background -

Knowledge of range, movements, habitat associations, and population status of birds is central to all aspects of conservation planning. Effective monitoring of distribution and population change across the

entire range of each species, which may cross international boundaries, is required to assess the species' status and to set priorities. Although there is a considerable amount of ongoing monitoring in the United States and Canada, knowledge regarding many species and areas is insufficient, and some species and areas are wholly unmonitored. A range of efforts from site inventory to continent-wide assessments is needed to fill these gaps. In Mexico, because there are virtually no long-term, broad-scale bird monitoring programs, the fundamental knowledge of population status necessary to establish conservation priorities (especially for those species whose ranges are limited mainly to Mexico and Central America) does not yet exist.

Setting priorities for conservation at national or international levels is dependent upon the knowledge derived from broad-scale monitoring programs. However, broad-scale monitoring and research are often not given sufficient priority as a component of conservation programs. There are few continent-wide monitoring efforts, and efforts to integrate existing programs into efficient and comprehensive regional or national strategies are in their infancy. Furthermore, although habitat change is the most common correlate of bird population change, there are essentially no dedicated efforts at the present time to develop broad-scale habitat monitoring programs.

Strategies -

Evaluate the status of existing monitoring efforts for sufficiency and initiate programs to meet the unfulfilled needs of all species and habitats.

Establish standard and comparable protocols for all commonly-used monitoring methods based upon sound statistical principles.

Establish and maintain repositories for all commonly collected types of monitoring data; data should be electronic, effectively geo-referenced to facilitate incorporation into Geographic Information Systems, and readily available to the public. Data should be regularly analyzed and results provided in appropriate forms to managers and other users.

Enhance the ability of individuals and organizations to accomplish monitoring and/or research needs through, for example, more extensive training and funding. Support both professional and volunteer citizen-science monitoring and, where possible, incorporate bird monitoring into other volunteer citizen programs.

Develop the capacity to monitor changes in the extent and quality of habitats important to priority birds, and evaluate these data with regard to habitat objectives.

III. 2. Evaluation of Conservation Actions

Background -

In geographically comprehensive species conservation programs, evaluation operates at two levels: one prior to determining the appropriate conservation action, and the other in conjunction with the following conservation action. At the first level, unusual population change (especially decline) detected by broad-scale monitoring programs may require evaluation through research, to ascertain the likely cause(s) of the change (i.e., habitat fragmentation or degradation, widespread use of certain toxic chemicals). Research has revealed many of the relationships between birds and habitat that are central to conservation. Once the likely causes of the observed population changes are identified, research can be applied at increasing levels of intensity to tease apart the demographic components (e.g., survival, recruitment). These kinds of information bases allow the planning and implementation of meaningful conservation actions.

Conservation actions can and should be structured in such a way that they serve as scientific experiments, testing the validity of the hypothesized cause(s) of population change. Hence the second level of evaluation: monitoring response of the target population to prescribed management actions, typically at the scale of the planning unit or smaller. Such monitoring programs must be carefully designed to allow statistical interpretation of the response and comparability, and should begin prior to the management action in order to ascertain baseline population status. Properly structured, management and monitoring will be an iterative process through which management can be periodically improved to achieve the desired result. In the course of this process, questions are likely to arise that can guide new research efforts that will ultimately allow further refinements to the management regimes.

The kinds of monitoring programs necessary for evaluating effectiveness of management are likely to be different from those employed in broad-scale geographic monitoring. They also are likely to vary from one management program to another. Nonetheless, for evaluating similar management programs in comparable habitats, it is always advisable to consider using comparable statistical designs that will enable aggregation of databases across studies for broader scale analysis. The overall success of a continental conservation program can only be measured by the cumulative results of multiple management programs across the ranges of target species.

Strategies -

Facilitate research on important, geographically widespread, and difficult questions regarding the status of bird populations and habitats, so that conservation actions can be focused most effectively.

State assumptions made during the process of planning for bird conservation, along with the scientific basis and degree of certainty behind each assumption.

Evaluate the efficacy of conservation actions through tailored monitoring programs and evaluate assumptions through research, setting priorities based upon those assumptions that are most critical but have the highest degree of uncertainty. Synthesize results into an evaluation of the conservation planning model for planning units at all geographic scales.

Follow a process of evaluation with modification and improvement of actions, assumptions, relationships, or structures of the bird conservation plan where warranted.

Analyze, and examine for sufficiency, the status of conditions and conservation objectives for the year-round range of birds above certain priority thresholds.

IV. Support

IV. 1. Education and Information

Background -

The conservation of birds and bird habitats depends, to some extent, on political processes, public opinion, and the commitment and skills of individuals. Education and information dissemination are important, but, with limited resources, will only be effective if crafted to reach and affect targeted audiences that presumably can increase the likelihood of achievement of bird conservation objectives.

In the long run, increased general environmental awareness in the populace at large will help bird conservation. All relevant elements of society should be educated about bird conservation and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. In a more immediate sense, reaching small audiences of decision-makers and land managers is a more pressing information and education need.

Strategies -

Improve public environmental education, including use of bird-relevant curricula in schools, in order to improve support of bird conservation initiatives.

Train and support an adequate cadre of professional ornithologists, managers, and conservationists.

Ensure effective information transfer between researchers and land managers, between planners and conservationists, planners and educators, and across international boundaries.

Communicate relevant and compelling information regarding bird conservation to land managers and decision-makers in agencies, legislatures and other levels of government, local community interests, corporations, landowners, and other organizations.

Educate individuals involved in bird conservation about the social and economic phenomena that largely determine land use.

Identify opportunities and encourage amateur birders at all levels of experience to become active

contributors to bird conservation.

IV. 2. Policy

Background -

Bird habitat can be maintained or improved and bird mortality decreased if appropriate and sensitive policies and procedures are employed. Such policies and procedures potentially exist at all political levels, from international to very local. Governmental efforts related to such issues as agriculture, transportation, and water can dramatically affect landscapes and the conservation of birds. However, bird conservation issues are rarely considered in the development and implementation of domestic and international policies of governments and organizations. Furthermore, some of the policies that explicitly deal with bird conservation fail to address the most critical issues or the breadth of conservation needs.

Strategies -

Promote voluntary improvement of practices, policies, and products of corporations and other private organizations and individuals as they relate to bird populations and bird conservation plans.

Review and improve policies regarding land use (landowner incentives, agricultural subsidies, etc.) in order to benefit bird populations.

Stimulate development of laws, regulations, policies, and practices of public agencies and legislative bodies to benefit bird populations and help achieve goals of bird conservation plans.

IV. 3. Financing

Background -

Implementation of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative will depend upon investment by all of the governments, agencies, organizations, and individuals committed to bird conservation. It is clear that currently available funding is insufficient, and that delayed response to conservation needs will only increase costs. Creative leadership is needed to capture the imagination of the public and to use that power to assure that birds and other components of natural ecosystems are conserved.

Governmental responsibility for the conservation of populations of migratory and non-migratory birds traditionally has not been adequately assumed. This responsibility is in large part federal, but is shared by state, provincial, tribal, and local governments and cannot be satisfied without their support and cooperation. Also, individuals interested in non-game birds historically have not provided a substantial input of funds for bird conservation.

International boundaries should not be barriers to the flow of resources. Funding from wealthier areas, particularly those with lower bird conservation priorities, may assist with the accomplishment of objectives in less-wealthy areas with high bird conservation priorities.

Strategies -

Develop public/private partnerships to fund conservation action. Partnerships should draw upon a wide variety of public sources, including a breadth of federal, state/provincial, local, tribal, and other agencies, and private sources, including corporations, foundations, non-governmental non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and individual donors and members.

Dedicate funds for planning and evaluation, research and monitoring, and outreach in addition to habitat-related conservation actions.

Reduce redundancy, inefficiencies, and unnecessary bureaucracy in order to allow dedication of increased resources to effective conservation actions.

Integrate bird conservation into broader existing and new conservation or land use programs wherever possible.

APPENDIX

CONTEXT:

International Treaties:

The importance of internationally coordinated management of shared avian resources has been recognized in a series of conventions or agreements that have significant implications for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. These include:

Convention for the Protection of Migratory Birds -

signed by the United States and Canada in 1916; called for hunting limits for migratory game birds and protection for non-game migratory birds;

Convention for the Protection of Migratory Birds and Game Mammals -

signed by the United States and Mexico in 1936; called for hunting limits for migratory game birds and protection for non-game migratory birds;

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention, 1971,

signed by Canada in 1981, Mexico in 1986, and the US in 1987) - provides recognition to important wetland areas in the world;

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES, 1973) -

offers some protection for many North American bird species;

Convention on Biological Diversity -

ratified by Canada and Mexico in 1992, but not by the United States; calls for the protection of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance of viable populations of species in natural surroundings;

Trilateral Agreement for Wildlife, Plants and Ecosystem Conservation and Management (1996) -

led to creation of a Trilateral Committee that includes representatives of the wildlife agencies of Mexico, the US and Canada, who now meet each year to coordinate various conservation matters.

Mexico:

During recent years, conservation politics have been aimed toward the care, management and sustainable use of biodiversity more than any particular taxonomic group. Important manifestations of these policies include the System of Protected Natural Areas, the Program for the Conservation and Use of Wildlife in the Rural Sector, as well as completed legislation, social participation, environmental education, inter-institutional coordination, and systematic and efficient information management.

In spite of the great avian diversity of the country and the enormous economic and cultural importance of birds, interest in bird conservation is relatively new and still a focus of only a few people and institutions. From a research perspective, most field activities, including inventory and monitoring as well as scientific collections, are accomplished by a diverse and widespread system of academic institutions, some non-governmental organizations, and foreign researchers. The various conventions, agreements and programs of international cooperation have played an important role in the development of projects and actions regarding avian conservation, particularly for migratory species. Although they have provided funds and material resources and have built capacity, they unfortunately have had a limited social impact.

There is now increased recognition of the biological, cultural and economic importance of birds. This has made possible the broadening of a participation base, the generation of funds, and development of planning tools and management information, such as the Important Bird Areas, the Atlas of Mexican Birds and the "Priority Areas for Conservation in Mexico" projects. Nevertheless, there is insufficient information regarding the status and population trends of many birds, as well as limited inventory, monitoring, and management actions.

Conservation of biological diversity and sustainable development are priorities in Mexico. The international cooperation in bird conservation efforts represents a key element in achievement of these objectives.

United States:

The focus of bird conservation in the United States for most of the twentieth century has been the protection and management of migratory game birds, in particular the conservation of waterfowl. Waterfowl

population declines and wetland losses have helped stimulate significant achievements, notably the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (1986) and laws providing for wetland protection (including the Clean Water Act). In the first dozen years of its existence, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan attracted more than a billion U.S. dollars to waterfowl and wetland conservation. Most of these conservation actions have had significant positive impacts on non-waterfowl wetland and wetland-associated wildlife. In general, waterfowl and wetland conservation has a significant base of support in agencies, conservation organizations, some private companies, and the general public.

Responsibility for management of non-migratory game birds, including grouse, quail, and turkey, lies with the states. With the assistance of focused non-governmental organizations (Quail Unlimited, Wild Turkey Federation, Ruffed Grouse Society, Pheasants Forever, etc.) and private landowners, most states have had remarkable success in increasing and maintaining populations and sustainable harvests of these birds. Some species, however, are currently suffering from the same ecosystem deterioration that is affecting other birds.

In recent decades, actions spawned by the Endangered Species Act have benefited many of the rarest bird species. A growing and strengthening movement directed at the conservation of all migratory bird populations and their habitats began in the 1970s and 1980s. The movement is still in its infancy with the beginnings of comprehensive conservation plans to deal with non-game birds. There has been significant development and maturation within Partners in Flight to address the needs of landbirds. National efforts to address shorebird conservation and the needs of colonial waterbirds are also emerging. However, there is much to be done to gain the necessary funding and cooperation to fully implement these efforts.

Canada:

For most of this century, bird conservation in Canada has equated to population management. However, under Canada's constitution, while migratory bird population management is the purview of the federal government, migratory bird habitat management is primarily the purview of the provinces. Thus, effective conservation of birds in Canada requires close cooperation between these two levels of government. And, because more than 3/4 of Canadian landmass is Crown (public) land, governments have a large responsibility for conservation of bird habitat.

Generally, the federal and provincial governments have worked well together, and with non-governmental agencies and private land managers, to conserve waterfowl and other migratory hunted species. However, it is only since the 1970s that there has been active and growing interest in the conservation of non-game species. Canada has active research and monitoring programs on shorebirds, waterfowl, seabirds, and landbirds and has worked through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and Partners in Flight-Canada to promote the conservation of all bird species. Aboriginal Canadians have growing responsibilities for the management or co-management of wildlife, especially in the northern territories. Bird conservation in those vast areas will largely depend on new governmental approaches being developed by northern peoples.