

Project 10
Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region Initiative
Final Report

State: Alabama

SWG Grant Number: T-4-P-1

Period: October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2009

Need:

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative was launched in 1998 as an effort to “deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships.” This project provides the framework for Alabama to support and participate in the Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region Initiative (AMBCRI), a self-directed coalition of public and private interests vested in the conservation of birds within the Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region. This partnership, now officially recognized as the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture (AMJV) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has the specific intention and commitment to deliver objectives of national and international bird conservation plans within the Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region. These multi-level, multi-agency partnerships have proven to be the most effective way to deliver bird conservation on the landscape scale. This approach is fully consistent with objectives identified in the Alabama Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS).

The AMJV ranges over portions of 12 states and 7 Partners in Flight (PIF) physiographic regions covering approximately 103 million acres, including 28% of Alabama (9,288,351 acres). In conjunction with the East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture, these two JV partnerships encompass 89-percent of Alabama. The AMJV consists mostly of privately owned forest land and provides habitats for 185 breeding bird species. Most of these are landbirds associated with upland habitats. Several are listed as threatened, endangered, or of special concern by state and federal wildlife agencies. The Appalachian Mountains are also used by many species during migration, including short distance temperate migrants and Neotropical migrants.

The Alabama CWCS identifies 15 bird “species of greatest conservation need” that occur in the AMJV. The AMJV will engage in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities that will enable the development of conservation actions in the next iteration of the Alabama CWCS.

These actions will be linked to the delivery of continental and range-wide bird conservation goals expressed in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Flyway Plans, the PIF North American Landbird Conservation Plan, the U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, North American Woodcock Management Plan, Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan. The AMJV is an effective means of leveraging, coordinating and efficiently utilizing the fiscal and logistical resources of bird conservation stakeholders in the region. In addition to making significant contributions to continental bird conservation, the AMJV will promote an improved socio-economic environment through benefits to natural resource related industries, such as forest products, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and nature tourism. Ultimately, by developing and delivering a regionally-based, biologically sound approach to all-bird conservation, the AMJV will promote ecosystem sustainability; one of the principles embodied in

the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

Objective: The objective of this project is to provide financial support for the staffing and development of the Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region Initiative.

Expected Results and Benefits: This project will provide significant and tangible benefits to all species of birds within the Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region, by supporting the partnership and necessary mechanisms to develop habitat conservation planning and delivery tools to achieve habitat targets for priority bird species within this geographic region. This project will provide the means for Alabama to participate in this partnership and to utilize the products and materials produced by the AMBCRI in the development and ongoing planning activities of the Alabama Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

Approach: Institutionalize the partnership by providing financial support for a Coordinator, Steering Committee and technical committees. Develop a long-term strategy for comprehensively addressing bird conservation in the Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region. Work with partners to implement conservation strategies for high priority habitats.

Target Date for Achievement: September 30, 2009

Completion Date: September 30, 2009

Activities:

Throughout the granting period, funding has been used to support the Appalachian Mountain Bird Conservation Region Initiative coordinator, partnership development, and conservation planning activities. The following activities have been supported throughout the reporting period:

- **Administration:**
 - Hiring of a full-time coordinator for this Initiative, which was vital to initiate all of the planning, infrastructure development, budget oversight, and coordination among partners.

- **Infrastructure:**
 - Coordination with other State, Federal, and non-profit partners in the region to establish a diverse and engaged Management Board to provide long-term vision and guidance to the partnership. The AMJV Management Board is represented by 18 organizations and has regular participation from other organizations at our bi-annual meetings. This Board has evolved from a BCR Steering Committee under the guidance of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, to a formally recognized habitat Joint Venture with administrative support from USFWS.
 - The AMBCR/AMJV has developed an engaged and diverse Technical Committee to identify, prioritize, and address bird conservation issues in the region through directed research, monitoring, on-the-ground habitat work, and/or strategic planning .

- Development of working groups to address AMJV's highest priority issues (because of a lack of organized information and rapidly evolving threats). Members of the AMJV Technical Committee and Management Board are participating on working groups for "High Elevation Forests" and "Energy/Urbanization." Members are assisting with the development of biological planning, conservation design, and monitoring/research facets for each area of interest. Experts and additional funding are being brought to bear on these issues to help address the breadth and scope of each project.
- **Planning:**
 - Development of an initial AMBCR Concept Plan (2005), which served as a scoping document of partners interests and ultimately catalyzed partners to pursue Joint Venture status. The Concept Plan laid significant groundwork for the development of the AMJV's Implementation Plan, a necessary step in the process of being recognized as a Joint Venture.
 - Compiled information from partners to draft the "Implementation Plan for the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture: a Foundation for All-bird Conservation in the Region." This plan was the culmination of input from our Technical Committee, contributions from experts outside of our partnership, and critical review from our partners (Management Board and Technical Committee members). This plan included 1) a priority species list for the Joint Venture, 2) a rough draft of bird habitat conservation areas throughout the region, 3) discussions on setting population objectives for priority species, 4) limiting factors in the region, and 5) lists of priority research, monitoring, and implementation projects. The plan was submitted to USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation for review on 30 May 2008 and was approved in October 2008. The plan articulates our vision for strategic conservation in the region and satisfied a major step that helped us attain Joint Venture status as described in 721 FW 6 (USFWS policy on Joint Ventures)
 - Initial stages of the AMJV's first strategic plan, which will help establish funding priorities, timelines, and approaches to achieve our goals.
 - Initial stages of population objective setting for several priority species of deciduous forests, as well as collaboration with East Gulf Coastal Plain JV on planning for 'shared' open pine species.
- **Research:**
 - Provided oversight to 2 research/monitoring projects addressing high priority Appalachian species; Black-capped Chickadee, and Northern Saw-whet Owl.
 - Coordinated with USGS personnel on a project for the NBII Southern Appalachian Information Node, which is designed to develop and compile landscape level planning information for priority species/habitats in the region.
 - Initial stages of project design to examine effectiveness of reforestation/restoration of minelands on productivity of priority species
- **Funding:**

- Throughout the grant period, this support helped leverage additional partner contributions from throughout the region. Each year until FWS approved administrative funding for the AMJV, non-FWS partners contributed \$50,000-90,000 per year to sustain the work of the partnership.
- AMBCRI staff obtained funding from USGS NBII Southern Appalachian Information Node to develop and compile landscape level planning information to aid in conservation design efforts of the partnership.
- In June 2009, AMJV applied to NFWF for a \$134,000 grant for early successional habitat work, starting in 2010. Recently awarded, AMJV staff will be working with Indiana University of Pennsylvania researchers and Golden-winged Warbler Working Group experts to develop forestry BMPs for Golden-winged Warblers in PA and western MD, will integrate those with BMPs for American Woodcock, and train local land managers/foresters on how to implement them. We will use this as a stepping stone for the entire AMJV in future grant cycles.

Funds provided by Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries via State Wildlife Grants (SWG) have been instrumental in supporting development from the *concept* of the AMBCRI to the *reality* of the AMJV. Similar to SWG during its early years, initial partner contributions to the AMBCRI supported numerous planning, organization, and administrative activities that have helped us build a strong biological and partnership foundation to build upon into the future. As we progress into advanced planning, design, and delivery projects through this partnership, we hope opportunities such as these (i.e., SWG support through our state partners) are available to this partnership. The AMJV truly appreciates the financial support and engaged members of the partnership that Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries has provided through our formative years.

Significant Problems Encountered:

None

Significant Deviations:

None.

Costs: See Grant Agreement, cost reflected on SF 269.