U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT RATING TOOL
PROGRESS EVALUATION

U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
MIGRATORY BIRD MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Y-RR-FWS-0012-2007 **APRIL 2008**

United States Department of the Interior

Office of Inspector General

Office of Inspections and Evaluations
381 Elden Street, Suite 1100
Herndon, Virginia 20170

April 14, 2008

Memorandum

To: H. Dale Hall
Director, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

From: Donald W. Cairns
Eastern Regional Manager

Subject: Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) — Progress Evaluation of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Migratory Birds Management and Conservation Program (Report No. Y-RR-FWS-0012-2007)

The Office of Inspector General recently had the opportunity to complete an independent assessment of the FWS Migratory Birds Program. We spent time with FWS employees and visited several field sites to learn about Program operations. We thank your staff for their time and valuable input.

Our team evaluated the progress your staff has made in addressing recommendations from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). We provide our observations in the attached report. Overall, Program officials have worked steadily to address the challenges identified in 2004, and we offer nine suggestions that we believe will help you to successfully manage the Program and demonstrate results. We encourage you to discuss these suggestions with your Assistant Director — Migratory Birds and implement those that you agree will improve FWS performance.

If you have any comments or questions regarding this report, please call me at 703–487–8011.

Attachment

PART PROGRESS EVALUATION:
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
MIGRATORY BIRD MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

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ON THE COVER:
Focal Species – the Blackfooted Albatross (left) and the Laysan Albatross (right). *Source: FWS.*

INTRODUCTION

WHY WE DID THIS PROGRESS EVALUATION

The Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior (DOI) asked the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to evaluate the progress made by programs designated **Results Not Demonstrated** by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB uses the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) to make these designations. More detailed information on the PART process can be found in Appendix A.

We selected the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Migratory Bird Management and Conservation Program (referred to as the Program) for this progress evaluation. OMB reviewed the Program in 2004 and plans to reassess it in 2008.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Based on its 2004 review, OMB made recommendations that relate to Program planning, performance, and evaluation. Our objectives were to determine what progress the Program has made toward implementing the OMB recommendations and to provide observations and suggestions that DOI and the Program can use in preparing for upcoming PART reviews.
To meet the objectives, we interviewed key officials at the Program's headquarters and reviewed Program documentation. We completed site visits and interviews with a number of FWS staff and joint venture partners, as indicated in Appendix B. We conducted this progress evaluation in accordance with the "Quality Standards for Inspections" established by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency. We based our suggestions on OMB 2007 PART guidance.

WHAT IS THE PART?

Federal agencies use the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), a standard questionnaire, to submit information on federal programs to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB examiners assess programs based on responses to YES/NO questions in the areas of program purpose and design, strategic planning, program management, and — most importantly — program results.

OMB uses the information to determine program effectiveness, to recommend improvements for rated programs, and to follow up on those improvements.

The ExpectMore.gov Web site publishes PART results.

See Appendix A for more information on the history and use of the PART.

OVERVIEW: MIGRATORY BIRD MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION PROGRAM

FWS and an extensive network of partner organizations operate at local, regional, national, and international levels to protect more than 900 species of birds and the habitats on which they depend. Through the Program, FWS fulfills America's obligations under more than 20 U.S. laws and international agreements.

Within FWS, the Assistant Director for Migratory Birds and State Programs manages the Program through two divisions at the headquarters level — the Division of Bird Habitat Conservation (DBHC) and the Division of Migratory Bird Management (DMBM) — and several regional offices.

The DBHC, in addition to other duties, administers grant programs for habitat protection and restoration, research and monitoring of bird populations, and related law enforcement, outreach, and education efforts. These grants provide funding on a matching basis, not only here in the United States but also to other countries throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The DMBM fulfills the Program's regulatory role. Each year, FWS issues guidance on allowable hunting seasons for the various species protected by the Program. State wildlife agencies (and Canadian counterparts) join with the FWS in four Flyway Councils — Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific — to coordinate these regulatory efforts. In addition to hunting, FWS migratory bird permits authorize the take and possession of migratory birds for a variety of purposes including scientific study, education, rehabilitation, and religious use. Nationwide, the Program's permit offices process more than 13,000 permit requests annually. Underlying these regulatory activities are extensive scientific efforts, including bird population surveys, ecological assessments, and related monitoring. The DMBM manages a research center and numerous field projects to inform international, federal, and state policymakers and other conservation actors.

Overall, the Program represents a complex web of relationships, centered on a common goal of protecting migratory bird species and the landscapes that sustain them. On-the-ground conservation activities across North America are coordinated by the regional offices and a number of partnership programs, referred to as joint ventures (JVs). These JVs are self-directed entities involving representatives from not only federal, state, and local government agencies, but also nonprofit and private sector organizations. JVs deliver conservation actions in furtherance of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) — through which the United States, Canada, and Mexico seek jointly to sustain our continent's waterfowl populations. Other partnership efforts may focus on limited geographies, or on efforts related to specific species. As key players in this collaborative network, Program officials seek to ensure that technical assistance is received wherever it may be most needed.

The Birds Forever initiative, a joint effort of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey, would expand and improve the health of wild bird habitat, strengthen educational outreach programs and [enable DOI to] work in partnership with states, local communities, conservation organizations, and other bird-loving partners to reverse [the] precipitous decline in wild bird populations.

DOI Press Release, February 2008

FWS administers more than $100 million in federal funds for migratory bird conservation, as summarized in Table 1. The budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2009, through its *Birds Forever* initiative, proposes a significant increase in direct appropriations for the Program, as well as a projected rise in the price of Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation (Duck) Stamps. If the Congress appropriates funding as proposed, FWS will receive added funding for Migratory

Bird Management, supporting partnership efforts and the monitoring and assessment of bird populations. Expanded information about species status would contribute to the development of management strategies for at-risk populations. Additionally, increased revenues from the sale of Duck Stamps would boost the Migratory Birds Conservation Account, enabling FWS to expand land acquisition in support of conservation objectives.

TABLE 1. PROGRAM BUDGET ($ in thousands)	**FY2007**		**FY2008**		**FY2009 Request**	
	FTE	$	FTE	$	FTE	$
Migratory Bird Management	217	40,352	217	40,441	242	53,195
North American Wetlands Conservation	9	39,893	9	46,564	9	43,147
Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation	1	3,941	1	4,430	1	3,960
Migratory Bird Conservation Account	66	43,723	66	40,000	76	54,036
Combined:	**293**	**127,909**	**293**	**131,435**	**328**	**154,338**

FTE = Authorized staff, in full-time equivalents
Source: FWS Budget Justifications

OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on its 2004 PART assessment, OMB made a number of recommendations to improve Program operations. We reviewed the Program in 2007 and observed extensive progress toward implementing the OMB improvement plan. In fact, only one of OMB's recommendations — to schedule and carry out independent program evaluations — was incomplete.

Overall, Program officials seem to have embraced the PART recommendations as providing the impetus to clarify the goals that drive migratory bird conservation efforts and to relate management plans to the budget. They have made significant progress, and they continue to work on ways to prioritize potential projects more effectively. Nevertheless, we did find some areas in which FWS managers could continue to use the PART's underlying planning and management principles to benefit their work. Our observations and suggestions follow. We address the topics of planning, performance measurement, and independent evaluation. We relate each of these topics to specific PART questions for which the Program was unable to satisfy OMB requirements during the last PART review.

PLANNING

Shortly before the PART review in 2004, FWS published *A Blueprint for the Future of Migratory Birds:Migratory Bird Strategic Plan 2004-2014.* The *Blueprint* calls for the Program's limited resources to be focused on bird populations in greatest need of conservation and management. In 2005, national and regional officials jointly selected nine focal species from a list of "Birds of Management Concern". Regional officials are working to develop action plans for these targeted species. As the action plans are completed, Program officials expect to be better able to develop reliable baselines and outcome targets for each focal species. Under the *Birds Forever* initiative proposed in the FY2009 budget request, the number of targeted focal species would expand from 9 to 36.

Focal Species: Painted Bunting. *Source: FWS.*

The *Blueprint* lists five implementation areas with specific strategies in each. For example, one implementation area — population monitoring, assessment, and management — includes a strategy of establishing "clear, quantifiable, and measurable objectives for all survey and monitoring projects" in the Program. With 69 different strategies across the 5 implementation areas, the *Blueprint* identifies national Program priorities broadly, but does not prioritize the underlying implementation strategies. Rather, FWS management relies on officials in each region to identify priorities appropriate to the species status and landscape conditions in their respective ecoregions and flyways.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION AREAS
Address the loss and degradation of migratory bird habitats.	**Population Monitoring, Assessment, and Management**
Increase and improve scientific information on migratory bird populations.	**Habitat Conservation**
Strengthen and expand regional, national, and international partnerships to achieve comprehensive bird conservation.	**Permits and Regulations**
	Consultation, Cooperation, Communication
	Recreation

Source: A Blueprint for the Future of Migratory Birds:Migratory Bird Strategic Plan 2004-2014.

At least one regional strategic implementation plan formally prioritizes implementation strategies from the *Blueprint*. Reviewed by representatives of pertinent flyway councils, states, and Partners in Flight, the FWS Region 4 (Southeast) plan — *Building on the Past, Providing for the Future* — provides JV councils and partners with information needed to focus efforts on Program priorities. In this region, JV councils consider regional priorities, focal species, and habitat conditions and review proposed conservation and research projects based on how each would contribute to Program objectives and meet the habitat needs of focal bird species. JVs and partners can then coordinate efforts to fund the most promising projects through the appropriate FWS grants process, cost-sharing arrangements, and other avenues.

PART QUESTION 4.1

Has the program demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its long-term performance goals?

PART QUESTION 4.2

Does the program (including program partners) achieve its annual performance goals?

Aligning regional priorities with the Program's implementation strategies should make it easier for field officials to articulate how individual projects would support the achievement of the Program's performance goals. Though draft documents do show that officials are making progress, the level of strategic integration among various FWS organizational levels — and between FWS and its partners — is not consistent from region to region. Identifying the best aspects of existing plans and sharing lessons learned can help officials finalize regional strategic implementation plans across the Program.

SUGGESTION 1

Program officials should assess existing Regional plans and identify best practices that can serve as criteria for more consistent development of prioritized plans in every Region.

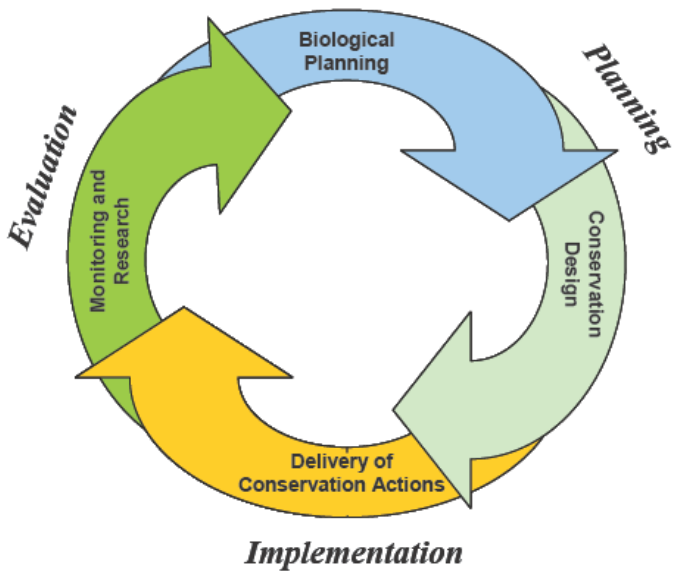
In addition, FWS is advancing a new framework within which to make strategic conservation decisions and improve conservation management. Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) is the result of a broad-based effort chartered by FWS management in 2004 to "… 1) characterize current and emerging scientific habitat conservation strategies and 2) recommend unifying approaches and capacity building measures." The team published its final report in July 2006, and FWS management officially endorsed the SHC framework in March 2007.

SHC incorporates biological planning, conservation design, conservation delivery, and monitoring and research into a business model structured to help achieve conservation objectives at multiple scales. The framework encourages analysis of landscape data in ways that enable researchers to evaluate capacity — the number of birds that specific habitats can sustain — as well as the potential impacts of changes in the environment, such as urban development or wetlands restoration. FWS officials expect that implementation of SHC will help not only the Program but also other agency programs and partners to be able to objectively demonstrate conservation achievements, and to better target conservation actions for specific populations and habitats.

STRATEGIC HABITAT CONSERVATION

Using this framework, we improve our abilities to define desired biological outcomes and articulate the consequences of site-scale actions on landscape scale functions.

Final Report of the National Ecological Assessment Team



However, confusion exists in various regions, where officials say they have some difficulty discerning the differences between SHC and traditional approaches to conservation. While the concept of SHC is supported in all Program regions, some officials have expressed a sense that further work needs to be done to clarify how SHC is intended to affect day-to-day operations in order to ensure successful implementation of the business model.

SUGGESTION 2

FWS officials should develop and conduct workshops for employees and appropriate Program partners to expand understanding of Strategic Habitat Conservation. Workshops should address the purpose of the SHC business model, its underlying principles, and the practical implications for conservation activities in the field.

As previously noted, the Program is part of a complex landscape in which conservation activities are accomplished through the combined efforts of many partners. In this environment, the role of FWS may range from its traditional regulatory and on-the-ground management capacities to that of a source of funding for private ventures or a partner in a scientific alliance.

Accomplishment of the outcome goals will depend on the efforts of many and will require the program to continue to work with partners to achieve these goals.

ExpectMore.gov

When FWS's role is that of funding source, much of the Program's funding serves as seed money that leverages other resources — such as matching fund contributions from various partners —to achieve specific actions. The conservation value achieved by these dollars significantly affects overall outcomes, so rolling up partners' accomplishments with FWS accomplishments

could give a more complete picture of the effectiveness of the Program. Some partners may not receive federal funding in a given year, but many of the FWS staff spend time in a technical assistance role that helps to maintain strong working relationships with Program partners. Officials feel these relationships are critical to the long-term success of the Program.

When FWS acts in the role of partner in a scientific alliance, it acts in part to address the issue of how best to practice sound science given limited in-house research capacity. FWS has entered into an agreement with the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology that includes an innovative research approach to collect certain types of data. The memorandum of understanding between the two parties outlines joint efforts to promote outreach and citizen science — the use of volunteers to collect data, generally with guidance from qualified scientists. Although some Program employees question the reliability of citizen science data, citizen science can provide trend data that can serve as a general benchmark against which to compare data collected through rigorous scientific means. Citizen science also offers an opportunity to build on the public's interest in birds and habitat conservation, an added benefit when considering the Program's PART outcome goal to sustain the "percent of American adults who participate in bird-related recreation".

In addition to some use of citizen science, Program officials tell us that, for years, they have worked with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) through a variety of formal and informal arrangements that differ from region to region and project to project. Often, the work is a matter of mutual interest, drawing funding from both FWS and USGS. At other times, the Program has had to engage USGS support through a fee-for-service model. Although these varying agreements have resulted in many important achievements, a formal interagency agreement between the two bureaus could institutionalize and clarify the partnership relationships that already exist at the staff level, and foster increased collaboration on scientific activities. This may have beneficial implications for the Program's ability to meet outcome goals.

SUGGESTION 3

FWS officials should strengthen the Program's partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey by entering into a formal memorandum of understanding that would clarify each bureau's capabilities, roles, and responsibilities.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Program officials used the PART process as an opportunity to focus on critical issues, such as how to convey Program effectiveness when external factors that range from catastrophic weather to international political and legal considerations significantly affect outcomes. Ultimately, officials developed the measures listed in Table 2. Since 2004, Program officials have developed baseline estimates and performance targets for these key measures, and they continue to perfect data collection processes to assure accuracy of performance information.

PART QUESTION 2.4

Does the program have baselines and ambitious targets for its annual measures?

TABLE 2. PROGRAM PERFORMANCE MEASURES		
Percent of all migratory bird species that are at healthy and sustainable levels	Long-term	Outcome
Percent of adult Americans who participate in bird-related recreation	Long-term	Outcome
Percent of bird population management needs met to achieve healthy and sustainable populations of birds listed on the Birds of Management Concern list	Annual	Output
Percent of habitat needs met to achieve healthy and sustainable levels of migratory birds	Annual	Output
Percent of migratory bird species that may be harvested for sport hunting or falconry according to the Migratory Bird treaties for which harvest is formally approved	Annual	Output
Acres of wetland restored per million dollars expended	Annual	Efficiency

Source: *ExpectMore.gov*

Program officials have also made significant progress in tying the accomplishment of annual and long-term performance goals to the budget and in outlining subsequent resource needs. For example, staff at the Patuxent Research Center told us that specific projects listed in their annual work plan link to the general strategies from the national *Blueprint*. Supervisors assign project activities to individual employees, who track their time and related expenditures. This spending can be tied back to the work plan and, ultimately, to FWS budget processes.

PART QUESTION 2.7

Are budget requests explicitly tied to accomplishment of the annual and long-term performance goals, and are the resource needs presented in a complete and transparent manner in the program's budget?

PART QUESTION 3.2

Are Federal managers and program partners … held accountable for cost, schedule, and performance results?

In addition to integrating performance information into budgetary decision making, PART guidance indicates that managers and partners should be held accountable for results. Officials in at least two FWS regions have developed supervisory performance plans that not only link to programmatic performance objectives but also specify related individual performance goals. Outside the FWS, JV offices distribute federal funds to partners who are accountable for providing certain outputs by certain times, as agreed to through the planning or grant-making processes. FWS regional officials track these deliverables and monitor projects to see if they are getting what they expect. If a designated partner is not delivering as expected, officials then can either revamp the project or cancel it.

Thus, the connection between the budget and field-level accomplishments should be traceable. FWS staff and partners produce on-the-ground results through projects prioritized from national- to regional- to field-level planning documents, and officials tell us this linkage is becoming more refined as information collection and strategic plans increase in sophistication. Depending on the scope and complexity of the projects, field offices typically report results about three years after the initial allocation of funds (for example, projects initiated in FY2005 may be completed and reported as FY2008 accomplishments).

However, FWS staff expressed some concerns to us over how best to capture data on the same activities for different purposes and from many different partner data sources. Some FWS staff at regional and field offices say that confusion exists about the various performance measures and data calls associated with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), PART, and other DOI and FWS management information needs. Perceived disparities in these tools of accountability continue to challenge officials in the field, especially those who are trying to communicate reporting requirements to partners not bound by federal ties.

Some FWS officials in the field have also expressed concerns about inconsistencies in data collection among JVs. FWS Regional Offices are partners in each JV, but once formally established, these JVs are autonomous entities rarely managed by an FWS official. JVs report directly to Program Headquarters. Given the de-centralized model of FWS, FWS management might help to improve consistency and timeliness by revising procedures so that each JV reports GPRA, PART, and other key performance data through an affiliated FWS Regional Office. Such a process might also help to identify more reliably the accomplishments achieved through the leveraging of partner resources with federal funds. Reporting JV accomplishments along with Program accomplishments could provide a more accurate depiction of the combined achievements of the Program and its partners.

SUGGESTION 4

FWS officials should work with JV management bodies to revise reporting procedures for key performance information, and vest FWS Regional Offices with responsibility for performance data validation.

During the 2004 PART review, Program officials struggled to define a meaningful efficiency measure. Officials considered using the number of permits processed within 30 days as a possible efficiency measure, but this was not accepted during the 2004 PART process. Generally, PART guidance indicates that the strongest measures of efficiency are those that relate outcomes to cost. However, due to the many external factors and long time horizons involved, many Program officials note considerable difficulty in drawing a direct one-to-one correlation between conservation outcomes and dollars budgeted.

PART QUESTION 4.3

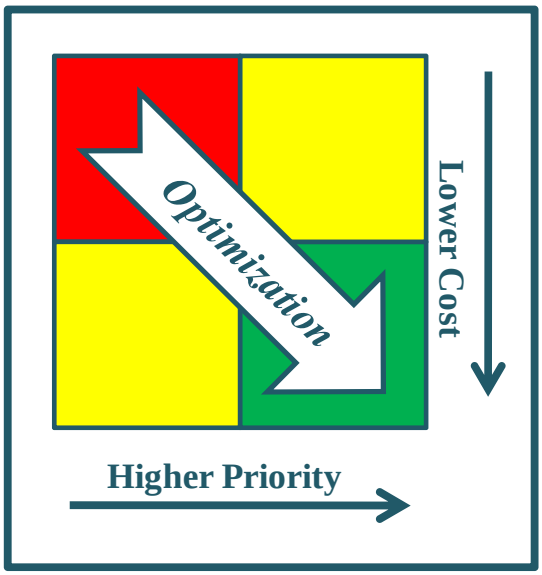
Does the program demonstrate improved efficiencies or cost effectiveness in achieving program goals each year?

Ultimately, Program officials and the OMB examiner agreed to the measure “acres of wetland restored per million dollars expended”. This measure assumes restoration costs only and not land acquisition expense. Some officials continue to

express dissatisfaction with this as an efficiency measure. Indeed, there are many variables affecting the cost of restoration, such as the condition from which acreage is to be restored, the location of restoration work, the availability of appropriate scientific data about the landscape and the species that inhabit it, and the availability of appropriate labor and equipment. Also, the number of acres cited for this measure would fluctuate considerably from one year to the next. Such substantial volatility in the annual calculation of this ratio could render nearly meaningless any attempt to use this measure to demonstrate Program efficiency (or inefficiency) over time.

Rather than simply tallying all results and dividing by the budget, a more effective means of handling such data might be to stratify results data in a way that addresses the underlying question: Are Program activities focusing scarce restoration funding on the most important habitats? As mentioned previously, funds from the Migratory Bird Conservation Account support the Program's outcome goals by supporting habitat acquisition. The Government Accountability Office (GAO), upon reviewing nearly five years of FWS land acquisition data in South Dakota, observed: "[FWS] has done a good job of acquiring high-priority habitat, but some cost-efficiencies can still be gained." The GAO report went on to cite several significant factors that impact the ability of FWS officials to achieve these efficiencies, and also noted that, even if acquisition strategies were to be optimized, FWS would not be positioned to meet its long-term goals without a significant increase in funding.

In their analysis, GAO staff parsed FWS data based upon the relative habitat value assigned to grassland easements, and by the per-acre cost of each easement acquired. To the credit of FWS officials administering the acquisition efforts, the analysis showed that the majority (52%) of acres studied were in higher priority zones at below average costs. The opportunities for additional cost-efficiency lie in the 5% of acquired acres that were in lower priority zones, but for which FWS had paid above average costs.



OIG Staff

It would seem that Program officials could apply a similar analysis to habitat restoration cost and results data. A related efficiency measure would require a baseline analysis of past data, together with performance targets that would reflect improved use of the Program's investment strategies over time by reducing the percentage of acres in the low-priority/high-cost quadrant and increasing the percentage of acres in the high-priority/low-cost quadrant.

SUGGESTION 5

FWS officials should revise its efficiency measure to show the extent to which Program resources are focused on restoring high-priority habitat at a reasonable cost.

Reporting against the Program's key performance measures requires a reliable sense of what each trust species needs to be "healthy and sustainable" — how many birds and breeding pairs there are, and what they need to survive. Though the Program does conduct targeted population surveys, particularly for game species, there is no way at a regional scale to reliably estimate populations for the Program's many trust species as these birds cross state, regional, and international boundaries. Officials expect that the modeling tools and predictive analysis currently being used on an inconsistent basis throughout the Program hold the key to future improved accountability. The strength of the modeling tools is that they enable a broad landscape view of the status of trust species along with the ability to examine the effect of certain actions on those populations in ways that link directly into management decision making.

Focal Species: Cerulean Warbler.
Source: FWS

Integrating datasets promises a new level of analysis that enables managers to begin addressing questions of sustainability and to predict population response to certain changes in habitat. For example, a data analysis project conducted at the Lower Mississippi JV enables FWS officials and conservation partners to draw information from two separate systems, integrating satellite imagery with Forest Service data on woodland characteristics. This allows for a more accurate picture of bird habitats in terms of wildlife needs. Staff can now consider the quality as well as the quantity of acres, and consider which acres would be most conducive for certain species. Such analysis could facilitate a better understanding of the consequences of development projects in certain areas, giving more timely information on which to base management decisions.

Information gathered from [aerial] surveys will document changes in the numbers and distribution of migratory birds and [researchers will] correlate these results to natural or man-made disturbances in the environment.

DOI FY2009 Budget Highlight: Birds Forever

Ultimately, sound scientific information must feed into managerial and policy deliberations if the Program's objectives are to be achieved. Expanded use of geographic information systems and new modeling technologies could more directly integrate scientific information into managerial decision making. It could also enable Program officials to develop performance targets and results information that are more meaningful and relevant to specific focal species and their habitat needs.

SUGGESTION 6

FWS officials should develop and conduct workshops for employees and appropriate Program partners to increase awareness of the latest technological improvements in conservation modeling. These workshops should include concrete examples of how such technologies have been used to date and include real data where possible.

FWS hires highly skilled technical experts in many disciplines. These experts could be better prepared to communicate with diverse constituencies and with officials who have decision-making authority if they understand the political landscape. Management and public policy training for technical staff could advance Program employees' ability to 1) work effectively with diverse constituencies, 2) understand the managerial implications of their research efforts and the channels that advance field data to Headquarters, and 3) better ground scientific research in management options.

SUGGESTION 7

FWS management should expand opportunities for management and public policy training for technical researchers serving at all levels of the Program.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

Independent evaluative activities have been conducted at various levels of the Program and in various ways. In one sense, this is inherent in the nature of a science-based program, as officials often seek peer review of population surveys, modeling efforts, and protocols for data collection. Although these efforts do not constitute a programmatic review, they do indicate a programmatic effort to engage outside expertise in validating the scientific basis for management decision making.

PART QUESTION 2.6

Are independent evaluations of sufficient scope and quality conducted on a regular basis or as needed to support program improvements and evaluate effectiveness and relevance to the problem, interest, or need?

At a broader scale, in 2007, a committee of international experts released a continent-wide review of accomplishments achieved over the 20 years since the NAWMP was first adopted. This *Continental Progress Assessment* included a review of the activities of all JVs and discussed key successes and challenges.

Joint Ventures have largely relied on acres as a measure of accomplishment. Since 1986, over 13 million acres of waterfowl habitat in North America have received some form of protection, which is often permanent. Plan partners have also restored or enhanced over 11 million acres of wetland and upland habitat in the U.S. and Canada.

NAWMP *Continental Progress Assessment*

FWS officials have also engaged the Wildlife Management Institute for another evaluative effort. At the time of our interviews, officials were in the process of defining the scope of the review.

Future evaluative efforts could focus more directly on the relative effectiveness of investments in species management versus habitat conservation. Alternatively, a thorough examination of the web of institutional relationships surrounding the Program may be useful. Partnership efforts result in activities that can be difficult to track overall, while also presenting significant challenges in differentiating the effects of federal activities from the contributions of other Program partners. An independent evaluator may be able to offer

suggestions on how to work more efficiently with these partners and to track accomplishments more discretely.

Monitoring and evaluation should take place in various forms at all levels of the Program, from Headquarters-driven national and international assessments, to local project- or site-specific reviews. Officials could charter benchmarking studies across regional boundaries to identify best practices (whether in field conservation or administrative matters) to share with all regions if applicable to local circumstances and needs. Regional staff we interviewed did indicate that there have been some third-party reviews of Program activities on an as-requested basis, but not as part of a regular cycle of review. As implementation of the SHC framework matures, independent evaluation should become institutionalized as an important component of Program operations.

Completing independent reviews at regular intervals would be consistent with the SHC framework, the adaptive management philosophy — in which managers make changes based on the results of ongoing monitoring, and PART guidance. A regular cycle of small-scale reviews could enable Program officials to verify that their work continues to fulfill needs as intended, to make any necessary adjustments, and to assure achievement of project objectives. To the extent feasible, multiple perspectives (various disciplines; headquarters, regional, and field levels of the organization) should be engaged in effecting a comprehensive evaluation strategy.

SUGGESTION 8

FWS officials should develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation strategy that incorporates multiple perspectives in the assessment of Program activities at various levels and Program outcomes at various scales.

In addition to peer review and professional evaluation, FWS could assess various activities in the field using a model similar to that of the Small Business Administration's Service Corps of Retired Executives, in which retired business owners and executives volunteer their time to support small businesses nationwide. Given the compelling mission of the Program, FWS may be able to engage former employees, active and retired university professors, and others who have appropriate expertise to volunteer their time to help provide assurance that the Program is fulfilling its goals. Enlisting knowledgeable volunteers in this manner could help to defray the potential cost of third-party reviews.

SUGGESTION 9

FWS officials should work to engage a cadre of skilled volunteers to provide independent assessment of Program operations in the field.

Continued progress in integrating planning processes and validating performance data, together with expanded monitoring and evaluation, should prepare FWS to demonstrate important results through the Migratory Bird Management and Conservation Program.

APPENDIX A: HISTORY AND USE OF THE PART

Planning and performance monitoring are required by law

In 1993, the Congress found federal managers to be "disadvantaged in their efforts to improve program efficiency and effectiveness, because of insufficient articulation of program goals and inadequate information on program performance." The Government Performance and Results Act (Public Law 103-62), or GPRA, was passed to promote a focus on results by requiring federal agencies to engage in strategic planning and performance reporting.

Objectives and results of federal programs are assessed during budget formulation

The "President's Management Agenda," which includes a U.S. Government-wide initiative to improve budget and performance integration, was published in 2001. The Agenda calls for agencies to monitor program performance and to incorporate performance review into budgetary decision-making.

To support this initiative, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) instituted a new activity within the context of budget formulation. OMB uses a standard questionnaire called the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) to engage federal programs in a review of program design, strategic planning, program management, and the achievement of results that demonstrate value for the taxpayer. Through the PART process, OMB rates programs as **Effective, Moderately Effective, Adequate,** or **Ineffective**. Alternatively, OMB deems programs that are unable to provide reliable performance information (thus precluding assignment of a program rating) **Results Not Demonstrated** and recommends establishment or improvement of mechanisms for performance measurement.

OMB has found that many DOI programs lack performance information

Of the 72 DOI programs assessed between 2002 and 2007, OMB rated only 8 programs (11 percent) **Effective** and placed 16 programs (22 percent) in the category **Results Not Demonstrated**. DOI programs assessed through the PART process reflect over $9 billion dollars in annual budget authority. Approximately one quarter of this spending is associated with programs that lack reliable performance information.

PART Ratings, 2002-2007	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs
Effective	8	11
Moderately Effective	23	32
Adequate	25	35
Ineffective	0	0
Results Not Demonstrated	16	22
TOTAL NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	**72**	**100**

PART findings can be used to 1) justify termination or substantial curtailment of federal programs, 2) support legislative or fiscal enhancements, or 3) promote management improvements. OMB publishes PART results on its ExpectMore.gov Web site, together with recommended improvement actions for every program it has assessed. Agency officials and program managers are expected to follow up on these recommendations and to keep OMB, and ultimately the public, apprised of progress through updates of the information posted to ExpectMore.gov and through internal communications. OMB then reassesses programs on schedules developed in consultation with responsible agencies.

APPENDIX B: SITES VISITED OR CONTACTED

FISH & WILDLIFE HEADQUARTERS
Assistant Director — Migratory Birds
Division of Bird Habitat Conservation
Division of Migratory Birds Management
FISH & WILDLIFE REGIONAL AND FIELD OFFICES
Alaska Region (Region 7)
Habitat and Population Evaluation Team
Midwest Region (Region 3)
Mountain-Prairie Region (Region 6)
Northeast Region (Region 5)
Pacific Region (Region 1)
Southeast Region (Region 4)
Southwest Region (Region 2)
JOINT VENTURE
Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture
WILDLIFE REFUGES
Tensas Wildlife Refuge, Louisiana
Patuxent Research Refuge, Maryland
Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico
Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico
Las Vegas Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico

APPENDIX C: TABLE OF SUGGESTIONS

NUMBER	SUGGESTION	PAGE
	PLANNING	
1	Program officials should assess existing Regional plans and identify best practices that can serve as criteria for more consistent development of prioritized plans in every Region.	5
2	FWS officials should develop and conduct workshops for employees and appropriate Program partners to expand understanding of Strategic Habitat Conservation. Workshops should address the purpose of the SHC business model, its underlying principles, and the practical implications for conservation activities in the field.	6
3	FWS officials should strengthen the Program's partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey by entering into a formal memorandum of understanding that would clarify each bureau's capabilities, roles, and responsibilities.	7
	PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT	
4	FWS officials should work with JV management bodies to revise reporting procedures for key performance information, and vest FWS Regional Offices with responsibility for performance data validation.	9
5	FWS officials should revise its efficiency measure to show the extent to which Program resources are focused on restoring high-priority habitat at a reasonable cost.	10
6	FWS officials should develop and conduct workshops for employees and appropriate Program partners to increase awareness of the latest technological improvements in conservation modeling. These workshops should include concrete examples of how such technologies have been used to date and include real data where possible.	11
7	FWS management should expand opportunities for management and public policy training for technical researchers serving at all levels of the Program.	12
	INDEPENDENT EVALUATION	
8	FWS officials should develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation strategy that incorporates multiple perspectives in the assessment of Program activities at various levels and Program outcomes at various scales.	13
9	FWS officials should work to engage a cadre of skilled volunteers to provide independent assessment of Program operations in the field.	13

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