

Integration of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) into Southeast National Park Service Planning and Operations¹

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Abstract

To encourage the involvement of southeastern National Park units in bird conservation efforts, the Southeast Region (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands) of the National Park Service (NPS) entered into an Interagency Agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Funds were provided for a two-year cost share program that provides a wide range of bird conservation guidance and support to the Southeast National Park Service. The means by which NPS units will increase their participation in southeastern bird conservation are 1) implementation of Avian Conservation Implementation Plans, 2) coordination between the National Park Service Inventory and Monitoring Program and established inventory and monitoring needs and priorities for southeastern bird conservation, 3) providing technical advice and expertise, and 4) development of a web site to facilitate communication among bird conservationists and National Park Service personnel.

Introduction

Since the creation of the now defunct National Biological Survey (a.k.a. National Biological Service - NBS), the National Park Service (NPS) has had limited participation in regional, national, and international bird conservation planning efforts. The NPS personnel responsible for coordinating bird conservation before creation of the NBS were all essentially removed from this duty when the NBS was created, reducing NPS participation in regional, national, and international bird conservation planning. However, individual efforts to promote bird conservation did continue and today, existing bird conservation efforts are largely attributed to individual park units and individuals in park units who have had support of the park superintendent or supervisor. A significant recent NPS contribution to bird conservation has been the development of the Park

Flight Program, a partnership between the NPS, the National Park Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, American Airlines, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to facilitate bird conservation between United States national parks and Mesoamerican national parks. Park Flight is a great step forward in promotion of bird conservation in the NPS.

Another significant NPS bird conservation initiative is the effort to coordinate and integrate the strategies and goals of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) into the Southeast Region of the NPS.

Some bird conservationists ask why involve the NPS? Simply stated, the NPS is the fourth largest landowner in the United States, consisting of over 380 national park units covering 83 million acres of land and water. The 64 units in the Southeast Region of the NPS represent 16 percent of the total number of park units in the national park system and cover approximately 5 percent of the land base (*fig. 1*). Park Service units in the Southeast Region include national seashores (Canaveral National Seashore, Cape Hatteras National Seashore), national parks (Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Everglades National Park), national recreation areas (Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area), national preserves (Big Cypress National Preserve), national battlefields (Cowpens National Battlefield, Fort Donelson National Battlefield), national monuments (Fort Matanzas National Monument, Ocmulgee National Monument), and others such as the Blue Ridge Parkway, Obed Wild and Scenic River, and Timicuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. The Southeast NPS units provide habitat for over 400 species of migrating, breeding, and wintering birds as well as a wide range of Federally and State listed threatened and endangered species. There is further potential for contributions to bird conservation, through bird or habitat conservation, research, education, or a combination of these. Additionally, the NPS attracts over 280 million visitors to the parks each year, 120 million of these in the Southeast Region, affording excellent recreational bird watching, opportunities for bird conservation interpretation, outreach, and education programs.

In 1999, the Southeast Region of the NPS recognized the importance of coordinating existing bird conservation goals into planning and operations of national

¹A version of this paper was presented at the **Third International Partners in Flight Conference, March 20-24, 2002, Asilomar Conference Grounds, California.**

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park units in the southeast. To support this recognition, the Southeast Regional Office approved and allocated funding for a two-year project to coordinate and implement NABCI strategies into the NPS Southeast Region. The NPS allocated eighty-eight thousand dollars for a two year period to support the project, cost-sharing with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Region 4 (Southeast Region) to hire a bird biologist to conduct the project. Additionally, the NPS wrote the Interagency Agreement which provides for technological assistance when needed. This project is unique in the NPS and represents a potential model for regional bird conservation programs and activities in the NPS.

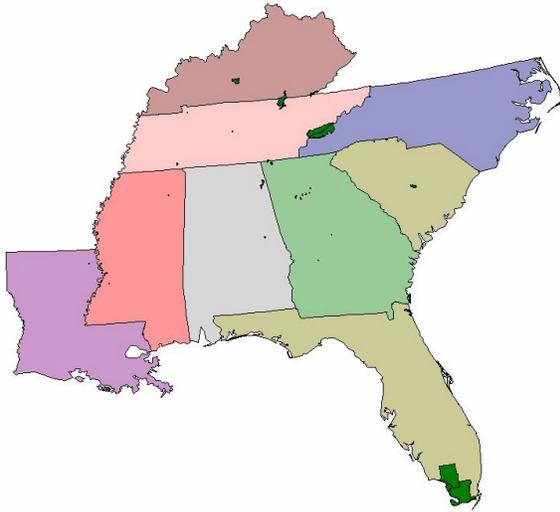


Figure 1— National Park Service, Southeastern Region.

What does “implementation of NABCI strategies” mean in the NPS? As envisioned, the coordination and implementation of NABCI strategies into the Southeastern NPS involves:

1. Develop and deliver Avian Conservation Implementation Plans (ACIP),
2. Coordinate with NPS Inventory and Monitoring Program,
3. Develop a web based project tracking site,
4. Establish bird conservation partnerships,
5. Identify and explore potential funding opportunities, and
6. Provide technical expertise to parks as needed or requested.

Avian Conservation Implementation Plans

The ACIP’s will be concise documents that describe the parks avian resources, ongoing bird conservation efforts, identified bird conservation projects and priorities, if any, and how the landscape of the park unit fits into greater landscape bird conservation efforts, regionally, nationally, and perhaps, internationally. These documents will serve to guide the park for almost any desired bird conservation effort. The preparation of these documents will require site visits to each of the southeastern national park units and information will be gathered following a standard format. The plans will be delivered to the park units based on the NPS Inventory and Monitoring network (see following section). The general content of each ACIP will include: (1) Introduction; (2) Background; (3) Role of NPS in Avian Conservation; (4) Park Description; (5) Avian Resources of the Physiographic Area; (6) Avian Conservation of Park Unit; (7) Park Identified Needs for Avian Conservation; (8) Coordination with Regional Conservation Initiatives; (9) Integration of NABCI Objectives and Recommendations; (10) Literature Cited; and (11) Appendices.

NPS Inventory and Monitoring Programs

In the early 1990s, the NPS embarked on a nationwide project to develop and implement an inventory and monitoring program in all parks with significant natural resources. The program was initiated in developmental phases using pilot parks. The program has been expanded to over 250 national park units, organized into networks of parks with similar resources and resource management issues. For instance, because South Florida and the Caribbean have similar natural resources, the national park units in these areas have been selected to comprise the South Florida/Caribbean Inventory and Monitoring Network. The NPS has developed a single plan to identify the basic inventory and monitoring needs of these parks.

The Southeast Region of the NPS is comprised of five inventory and monitoring networks; the Appalachian Highlands, Southeast Coast, South Florida/Caribbean, Cumberland/Piedmont, and Gulf Coast Networks (*fig 2*). To develop plans, the networks have established scoping meetings where resources indicators of park health or ecosystem health are identified and considered for monitoring purposes. The project coordinator attends each network’s scoping meetings to present relevant information on bird and habitat conservation priorities for the park, region, or bird conservation planning area of interest.

Web Site Development

A web site will be developed and administered through the FWS field office in Manteo, North Carolina. The web site will describe this project and provide links to: 1) existing bird conservation initiatives and plans, 2) NPS home pages (including inventory and monitoring pages), 3) FWS bird conservation web sites, 4) ACIP's, and 5) agency contact information. Access to agency contact information assists with the development and maintenance of partnerships between NPS, other agencies, and bird conservationists. This link will provide a database of nationwide NPS personnel contact information as well as key bird conservation specialists, biologists, and bird conservation coordinators. Agency contact information will be provided at five planning levels; NABCI BCR regions, PIF physiographic areas, NPS Regions, NPS Inventory and Monitoring Networks, and States. Each planning level will have an associated map with associated designations, i.e. BCRs, physiographic areas, regions, networks, and states. Each map designation will link to a database that provides personnel contact information. For instance, the PIF level map will show a map of the United States and Canada, Alaska, and Hawaii, and show all designated PIF physiographic areas. Each physiographic area will have an associated link to the contact database. For example, if the Southern Blue Ridge physiographic area is selected, the viewer is directed to the database table of associated NPS units in the Southern Blue Ridge physiographic area, individual unit information, including personnel information, and other primary bird conservation contact information. The web site will also have links to potential funding sources, the Park Flight Program, NPS bird checklists, and other relevant bird conservation web sites.

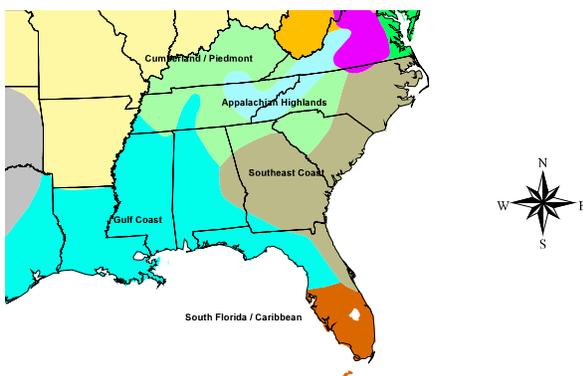


Figure 2— National Park Service, Southeastern Region Inventory and Monitoring Networks.

Established Partnerships

The project coordinator will work with the NPS and other bird conservation partners to develop and encourage partnerships that will facilitate cooperative bird conservation efforts and projects. NPS participation in the Appalachian Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) Working Group is one example.

Funding Opportunities

The project coordinator will work with the NPS and bird conservation partners within the existing framework of funding mechanisms to obtain funding for high priority bird conservation projects in the southeastern United States. Funding to conduct research on American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) in three national seashores on the Atlantic Coast has been obtained through this coordination.

Technical Expertise

The project coordinator will provide technical assistance upon request and assist park personnel in making the appropriate contacts with bird conservationists, partners, or other personnel to obtain the technical advice sought.

Results

Avian Conservation Implementation Plans

To date, 64 NPS units in the Southeast Region have been visited. Interviews have been conducted with staff at each of these units and information necessary to develop each ACIP has been obtained.

All plans are presently in preparation and over thirty are in review by parks or are final drafts. Draft ACIP's for the parks will be reviewed by park staff and their bird conservation associates to provide for an integrated implementation plan. Final copies of each ACIP will be available on the web site and usually on the particular parks internet home page.

NPS Inventory and Monitoring Programs

The project coordinator has participated in scoping meetings for the Appalachian Highlands, the South Florida/Caribbean and Cumberland/Piedmont Networks in the Southeast NPS. Bird and habitat conservation priorities for the park, region, and inventory and monitoring network landscape, were presented to the network teams for consideration in their monitoring plan development. This presentation also provides the opportunity for the network, or parks within the network to consider and potentially integrate NABCI bird conservation into their plans.

For example, in the NPS Cumberland/Piedmont Inventory and Monitoring Network, three PIF physiographic areas occur; the East Gulf Coastal Plan, the Southern Ridge and Valley, and the Northern Cumberland Plateau. Bird and habitat conservation measures identified in a draft PIF bird conservation plan were presented to the scoping meeting participants, including staff at these parks. A similar presentation was made to the South Florida/ Caribbean Inventory and Monitoring Network meeting participants.

Web Site Development

Development of the web site was contracted to a local individual. The web site address is: <http://southeast.fws.gov/birds/npsbirds.htm> and was launched in mid-July 2002.

Established Partnerships

Partnerships were established between:

- the NPS, FWS, US Geological Survey - Biological Resources Division, and North Carolina State University to conduct research on American Oystercatchers at Cape Hatteras, Cape Lookout, and Cumberland Island National Seashores
- the NPS, FWS, US Forest Service, Eastern Band of the Cherokee, and several academic institutions to conduct surveys for Appalachian Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in the Southern Appalachians
- the NPS and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (NPS became an official member)
- Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout National Seashores as participants in the International Shorebird Survey and web site entry into the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI)
- the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and FWS to manage landscape at “The Purchase” to improve habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*)
- Canaveral National Seashore and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge to share resources to accomplish management and protection of two federally listed species.

Funding Opportunities

The FWS submitted a proposal and received funding for research for American Oystercatcher on Cape

Hatteras and Cape Lookout National Seashores. A summary of funding opportunities outside the normal annual funding call of the NPS has been prepared and will be available on the web site. North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant program information was submitted to NPS Southeast Regional Associate Regional Director of Resource Stewardship and Science for transmission to park units.

Technical Expertise

Technical support and guidance is an ongoing activity.

Discussion

The integration and coordination of the NABCI goals into the Southeast NPS represents a unique approach to incorporation of bird conservation goals into an agency’s planning and operations. Approximately mid-way through this project, significant and enthusiastic cooperation has been given by the NPS. From the regional directorship down to the park resource manager and volunteer, the NPS has welcomed and encouraged this project and is excited to become a more active participant in southeastern bird conservation. Following completion and delivery of the ACIP’s to southeastern parks, the next phase will be transferring the conceptual and tactical strategies described in the ACIP’s into partnerships, funding opportunities, and projects that will translate to bird and habitat conservation in the NPS. Once fully embraced and incorporated into agency operations and planning, the ACIP’s for parks in the Southeast Region will enable the NPS to “deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally-based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.”

Acknowledgments

Special thanks is given to the Southeast Region of the National Park Service, especially Ms. Sheila Colwell and Mr. Jerry Belson. In the FWS, thanks to Mr. Chuck Hunter and Frank Bowers for promoting this concept of shared bird conservation visions between Department of Interior agencies and seeing that the opportunity became a reality.