

# WATERBIRD CONSERVATION FOR THE AMERICAS

- Desirability of evolutionary change
- Function, governance, structure
- Questions to guide change process

# Happy Birthday to Us

- Waterbird Initiative - Waterbird Steering Committee
  - April 1998, 10 years old
- Waterbird Conservation for the Americas – Waterbird Council
  - June 2003, 5 years old

These are very standard time frames for thinking about strategic re-positioning

# Organizations must change or become irrelevant!

- **Three choices**
  - **Do not change**
  - **Change through chance and happenstance**
  - **Change through planned strategy**

# What should we do?

- Structure follows function
- Do we agree on our function?
- “Fostering” Waterbird Conservation?
- “Fostering” is an interesting word – inference of care, feeding, encouragement but not direction, control, management.

# How to foster waterbird conservation?

- Passively
- Plan, communicate, facilitate
- Undertake conservation action

# How to foster conservation?

- **Passively**
  - Almost any structure will do
- **Plan, communicate, facilitate**
  - A committee that helps organize and encourage. Approximately current process
- **Undertake conservation action**
  - Needs an official corporate entity in order to solicit, accept, manage money, have staff, conduct projects. WCA is not a corporate entity.

# Governance

- Steering Committee (1998 -2003) – dedicated practitioners
- Waterbird Council (2003– date) - individuals, committed to waterbird conservation, connected to organizations and resources, at upper to middle levels of influence covering as many partnerships as possible.
- Alternative models
  - Institutional Membership (eg NABCI)
  - Organization of Partners (eg Birdlife, IUCN, Alliance)

# Committee Structure

## ACTIVITIES

- *Executive* -- Regular conference calls
- *Membership* -- Very little engagement.
- *Technical Services* -- Has not met as committee in 2007?
- *Policy and Critical Issues* -- No chair. Small set of activities spearheaded by Jennifer Arnold.
- *Communications* -- Regular conference calls.
- *Regional Planning and Implementation* -- recent reinstated regular conference calls. Not full participation.
- *Resources* -- No chair. Inactive.

# Committee Structure

## RESULTS

- *Executive* -- Communication
- *Membership* – Nothing, Done by staff
- *Technical Services* – Marshbird Assessment
- *Policy and Critical Issues* – Little recently
- *Communications* – Plan update, website, communication
- *Regional Planning and Implementation* -- communication
- *Resources* – Nothing
  
- Grades - 2- A, 2 –B, 2 - F

# Structure Really is More than Committees

- Council as a communication body
- Council members as individuals
- Staff
- Committees of Council members
- Organizations of Council members
- Regional Committees
- Semi-connected committees and task forces
- Other activities influenced by WCA
- Other activities not influenced by WCA

# How have we done?

- Where are we toward implementing the Waterbird Plan?
- “Fostering Waterbird Conservation” Report

# Successes

- Region of a national agency
- NGO associated with Steering Committee
- Bird Habitat Joint Venture
- National government
- WCA Regional Committees
- WCA Technical Committee lead through NGO
- WCA encouraged, NGO delivered

# Challenges

- Working within a Hemispheric framework
- Seabirds
  - Lesson: Uncertainty about how to engage in issues identified as priorities may suggest need for some level of strategic change in structure or function of WCA

# Questions Leading to Strategic Change 1

- Has Council achieved its stated annual work plans? Where yes – how? Where no – why not?
- Should Council continue to view itself as undertaking group activities outside meeting? Alternatively should it just focus on the communication and fostering value of annual meetings?
- If it is to undertake activities, is a committee structure the best way to accomplish this?
- If we have committees, should the Council narrow its group activities to coordination and communication?

# Questions Leading to Strategic Change 2

- Should stated expectations of Council members be adjusted?
- Might each member agree upon some specific responsibility or task rather than engaging in group activities.

# Questions Leading to Strategic Change 3

- Can Council maximize its role as an advising or guiding (“Fostering”) body?
- How should annual meeting be structured to best facilitate thinking around priorities and key issues to “foster” conservation?

# Questions Leading to Strategic Change 4

- Should Council pursue additional staff to form a more robust secretariate?
- Would a change in formal status of incorporation allow seeking funds, hiring staff, undertaking conservation activities?

# Questions Leading to Strategic Change 5

- How do we “Foster” waterbird conservation through the Hemisphere?
  - More Council members from south (current strategy)
  - Strategic, range-wide, flyway oriented mega-grant
  - Participate in larger Alliance derived from leadership in Latin America/Caribbean

# Questions Leading to Strategic Change 6

- Should we pursue holistic assessment of waterbird initiative? If so, how?
- Should we do a Strategic Plan? If so, how?
- Should we assure guided gradual change? If so how?

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