



Gulf Coast Joint Venture Newsletter

The Chairman's Corner



Jeff Raasch—GCJV Chairman

The Gulf Coast Joint Venture and Landscape Conservation Cooperatives: What does the future hold?

As always, the answer to that question is a bit of an unknown. As you know from our last Board meeting I have some strong feelings on the subject. "Strong feelings" should not imply that I am opposed to Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). It makes perfect sense to use the best science available to identify priority areas for conservation and most effectively direct scarce partnership resources. As a state agency person, I see using the LCC approach for all priority species across all taxa as the way to go. However, as Chairman of the GCJV, I see a multitude of unanswered questions about the future of bird conservation.

What is the role of the GCJV in the new Gulf Coast Prairie LCC (GCPLCC)? At this time, I am not sure anyone knows the answer to that question. JVs across the country have taken different

approaches from "choosing to ignore LCCs" to "being the bird arm of the LCC" to "asking to be the LCC." This diversity of approaches begs for some leadership to achieve consistency. The GCPLCC is made up of all or parts of three bird habitat JVs stretching from Louisiana to Kansas to central Mexico. Each of these JVs has its own unique partnerships and its own bird conservation challenges.

What do Landscape Conservation Cooperatives mean for long-term Joint Venture funding? Over the last 10 years, JVs and their partners have worked very hard to increase funding to JVs to expand capacity while embracing "all-bird" conservation. Recently, we have seen the creation and funding of new JV partnerships so that we now have wall-to-wall bird conservation partnerships across the country. The USFWS and JV staff have embraced the "Matrix," which clearly outlines what is expected of a mature JV. It also clearly shows that no current JV meets all the elements of the matrix, and JVs will require more funding and capacity to do so. The Association of Joint Venture Management Boards continues to lobby for more federal funds for JVs, but is this an exercise in futility as the FWS ramps up LCC funding? In the President's FY2011 budget, JV funding decreases while LCC funding grows significantly. In addition, what is the impact to JVs and LCCs in light of President Obama's recently announced 3-year freeze in the federal budget?

While I do not have answers for some of these questions, I do know one thing. As a Board, we need to stay very engaged in this issue, or we just may be left behind. As a JV we must

be a part of the decision-making process or risk becoming insignificant. Now is the time to act and take a leadership role in the development of the GCPLCC by speaking up on how we see this LCC forming. At the upcoming Board meeting, the Board will be presented with several options for developing a formal position on the forming of the GCPLCC, and hopefully, we can come to an agreed upon position. See everyone in the Katy Prairie!

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In Profile: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Partnerships are the key to the success of the GCJV, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has been a strong partner from the start. TPWD has brought much to the table over the years including leadership, funding, and expertise.

Throughout the evolution of the JV, TPWD has been a reliable partner and board member. For this reason, the partnership has looked twice to TPWD staff for management board leadership. Vernon Beville served as GCJV management Board Chair for many years, and Jeff Raasch serves as the current Board Chair.

Over the years, TPWD led the way when the partnership needed to expand its technical and research capacity, contributing

upwards of \$15,000 per year for almost a decade in support of the GCJV's Biological Team Leader. TPWD also contributed significant multi-year funding toward the Mottled Duck and Gadwall telemetry research projects.

Perhaps TPWD's greatest contribution to the partnership is its commitment to staff involvement in all levels of the JV. TPWD has had strong staff involvement in all 4 of the Monitoring Evaluation and Research Teams (MERT). Todd Merendino (now with Ducks Unlimited) served on the Waterfowl MERT for many years, and currently Kevin Hartke contributes to the team. Brent Ortego serves on both the Shorebird and Waterbird MERT, while Cliff Shackelford brings his

expertise to the Landbird MERT.

Many TPWD staff participate in one of the 3 Initiative Teams in Texas and provide input into the directions of those teams. Mike Rezsutek serves as Co-Chair of the Chenier Plain Initiative Team and Kevin Hartke serves as Chair of the Mid-Coast Initiative Team.

TPWD has also contributed creative expertise by lending a graphic artist to help the GCJV develop its new logo.

TPWD is utilizing many of the tenets of landscape conservation to approach conservation in the future. This will allow TPWD and GCJV to share many of the same conservation goals and objectives which will lead to a continued strong partnership.



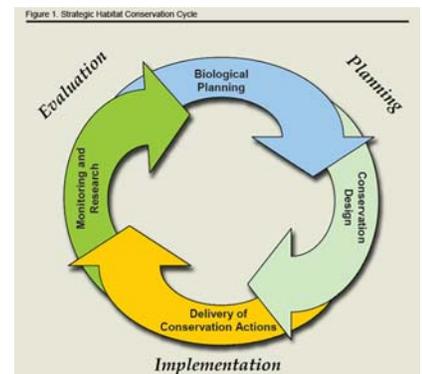
As a science-based conservation partnership, the GCJV acknowledges uncertainties within current models and seeks refinements to improve our waterfowl foraging habitat objectives.

Science in Action: Refining Habitat Objectives

The GCJV region provides some of the most critically important habitat for wintering waterfowl in North America, thus magnifying the need for strong scientific foundations to waterfowl conservation planning and habitat delivery within this area. Like most Joint Ventures of importance to migrating and wintering waterfowl, the GCJV operates under the hypothesis that availability of food resources is the most limiting factor for waterfowl during non-breeding periods. The GCJV uses bioenergetics models to calculate habitat objectives necessary to satisfy dietary energy demands of target waterfowl populations. Consistent with the philosophy of **Strategic Habitat Conservation**, the GCJV explicitly recognizes the uncertainties of bioenergetics models and seeks to continually update and refine these models.

Foraging habitat objectives for wintering waterfowl in agricultural regions of the GCJV were first developed during 2000 – 2002. Since that time, the GCJV partnership has strategically invested in 5 research projects to address explicit uncertainties within the GCJV waterfowl bioenergetics model. Specific changes include the following: 1) updating habitat use values for mallards, pintails, gadwalls, and mottled ducks in multiple GCJV Initiative Areas; 2) updating seed biomass estimates for harvested rice and idle agricultural fields; 3) recalculating species-specific daily energy demand values; 4) updating energy values for rice seed; 5) updating white goose (Ross' and snow geese combined) objectives to account for recent changes in abundance within the GCJV region; 6) estimating proportion of Ross' and lesser snow geese in total white goose counts; and 7) updating planted rice acreage estimates.

Effects of these changes will be reflected in the pending, revised waterfowl foraging habitat objectives for agricultural regions of the GCJV. This effort marks the first time a habitat conservation planning product of the GCJV has been subjected to the full cycle of Strategic Habitat Conservation, where the new objectives and bioenergetics model structure will provide refined guidance for waterfowl habitat conservation delivery and inform a new suite of model uncertainties and associated research priorities.



Meet the Staff: Mark Parr

The GCJV office staff is responsible for coordinating bird conservation planning, delivery, and evaluation for the partnership. Mark Parr has been part of the GCJV staff since 2004. Mark has traveled across the country and back again on his education and career paths. After graduating from The Ohio State University in 1990 with a B.S. in Forest Resource Management, Mark pursued a M.S. in Forest Science from the University of Georgia (1992) and a Master of Forestry, GIS/Remote Sensing from Colorado State University (2000). Mark worked as a research assistant, botanist and GIS/Remote Sensing Analyst for a variety of agencies and

organizations from Alaska to Louisiana before finally landing in his current position with the Gulf Coast Joint Venture.

As GCJV GIS/Remote Sensing Analyst, Mark's major duties include image processing of satellite and aerial photography, spatial analysis and modeling, and map production. He also carries the responsibilities of network administrator, webmaster, graphic designer, and IT support for the GCJV. Partners should contact Mark for assistance with the GCJV Managed Lands Geodatabase, as well as GCJV website issues. Mark is also available to assist JV partners with cartography to support habitat conservation

proposals of GCJV Initiative Teams.

In his down time, Mark enjoys many and varied activities including gardening, brewing beer, cooking, playing video games, biking, reading and "anything to do with plants." He also enjoys spending time with his wife Nicole and stepdaughter Isabella.

"I really enjoy working with such a dedicated, intelligent group of people and interacting with our partners. I've also enjoyed learning more about avian ecology, as my background has been plants, pixels, points, lines, and polygons," Mark said.

Mark can be reached at mparr@gciv.org or 337-266-8810.



Special Section: What is an LCC?

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) are applied science partnerships that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and other Department of Interior (DOI) Bureaus are developing with partners nationwide. LCCs will engage in biological planning, conservation design, development of inventory and monitoring programs, and assumption-based research in support of habitat delivery by the Service and partners.

While the origin of LCCs is clearly based on the success of bird habitat joint venture partnerships (JVs), they differ from JVs in 2 important ways 1) LCCs will operate from a unique **geographic framework**, and 2) LCCs will address resources beyond birds.

The 21 planned LCCs are intended to operate autonomously as guided by each respective Steering Committee of partners, while also maintaining enough consistency to function as a seamless national network.

LCCs will pursue population and habitat models under alternative climate scenarios to inform spatially-explicit decision support. They will be integral to climate change adaptation efforts, but they will not be climate-centric. Climate science support for LCCs will be provided by new DOI Climate Science Centers (CSCs).

The exact structure of LCCs will vary depending on existing partnerships and capacities within each specified geography, but each LCC is expected to be guided by a Steering Committee of partner organization executives and a CSC representative. The core of LCC staff will consist of a Coordinator, a Science & Technology Coordinator, Geographic Information System capacity, Population Modeler(s), Monitoring/Evaluation Specialist(s), and Decision Analysis Specialist(s). Reflecting the cooperative nature of LCCs, all staff positions may be supported by, or through, any LCC partner organization, or shared among partners.

The relationship between JVs and LCCs is unknown and will likely vary by LCC. The Gulf Coast JV is intersected predominantly by the Gulf Coast Prairie LCC, but also by the Gulf Coastal Plain and Ozarks LCC. Other JVs within the Gulf Coast Prairie LCC geography are the Rio Grande and Oaks & Prairies. The Service provided funding for 8 LCCs nationwide in the current fiscal year, with funds for other LCCs (e.g., the Gulf Coast Prairie and Gulf Coastal Plain & Ozarks) possible in future fiscal years. [\(more\)](#)

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Habitat Funding Update

The following **NAWCA Standard Grants** have been approved by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (NAWCC) and Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC):

- *Texas Chenier Plain Coastal Refuges (Cade Ranch)* – The Conservation Fund was granted \$1 million to address the acquisition of 1,000 acres of estuarine marsh in southeast Texas (Galveston County) for transfer to the adjacent Anahuac NWR.
- *Texas Chenier Plain Wetlands Improvement II* - Ducks Unlimited was granted \$998,543 to address the restoration or enhancement of 3,391 acres of fresh and coastal wetlands and associated habitats in southeast Texas on Anahuac NWR, J.D. Murphree WMA, and for prairie restoration at Houston Audubon Society's Horseshoe Marsh.
- *Texas Wetlands Restoration and Enhancement of Private and Public Lands, Texas Gulf Coast VII* - Ducks Unlimited was granted \$999,947 to address the protection, restoration, or enhancement of 4,605 acres of private and public wetlands on the Texas coast. The largest portion of grant funds will support construction costs for 3,200 acres of wetland development on private lands through the Texas Prairie Wetlands Project. Other grant funds will be used at Mad Island WMA and Laguna Atascosa (NWR) Lake.

The following **Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act** grant was approved by the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force in January 2010.

- *Lost Lake Marsh Creation and Hydrologic Restoration Project* – Project features include 465 acres of marsh creation, 30,000 linear feet of terraces, and the replacement of eight water control structures. A total of \$2.3 million was awarded for engineering and design. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will serve as the federal project sponsor. Certain features of this project (i.e., water control structures) were reviewed and supported by the Mississippi River Coastal Wetlands Initiative Team and presented before the GCJV Management Board as the Carencro Bayou Marsh Management Project.

Gulf Coast Joint Venture

A regionally based, biologically driven, landscape oriented volunteer partnership of private, state, and federal conservation organizations dedicated to the delivery of habitat conservation important to priority bird species.

The GCJV is a bird habitat conservation partnership that spans the coastal portions of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. It is one of 18 bird habitat joint ventures within the U.S.

The mission of the GCJV is to **advance the conservation of important bird habitats within the GCJV region** through biological planning, implementation of habitat conservation actions, and focused monitoring and evaluation of the planning and implementation process. The GCJV encompasses a wide variety of habitats, from seagrass beds, coastal marsh, and barrier islands to bottomland hardwood forest, fresh emergent wetlands, rice fields and bald cypress swamps.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Steve DeMaso started February 1st as the **Monitoring Coordinator** for the Gulf Coast Joint Venture.

A native of Battle Creek, Michigan, prior to coming to the GCJV, Steve was the Director of Upland Game Bird Research for the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

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