



# GCJV Newsletter

## Bird's Eye View: The Chairman's Corner

Welcome to the first edition of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture's newsletter! We anticipate distributing a newsletter such as this twice a year for the primary purpose of strengthening communications and common understandings within the core of the GCJV partnership (i.e., Board member organizations). Within my own organization, I intend to broadly distribute these newsletters to staff whose day-to-day work activities do, or could, intersect GCJV objectives. My hope is that these newsletters assist my organization and yours in better understanding what a JV partnership is, how staff can become engaged, and how JVs can provide context and assistance to their work.

While we have a very capable team of joint venture staff providing leadership, coordination, and expertise, ultimately the success of this joint venture is dependent on the commitment of our partner organizations and their staffs to participate in the

development, refinement, and attainment of a common set of bird habitat objectives. Each newsletter will profile a different GCJV partner organization, highlighting the role(s) they play in fulfilling the substantial expectations of joint venture partnerships. My hope is that these partner profiles will increase our awareness of each other's bird conservation activities that directly relate to that common set of joint venture objectives, and perhaps generate ideas about how to improve the interconnectivity of our efforts.

I'm encouraged by the progress we've made thus far together, but I also see challenges looming on the horizon (e.g., climate change, urban expansion, water supplies, and integration with non-bird conservation initiatives) that will demand even more from our bird-oriented partnership. This newsletter is but one small step to improving communication and coordination to better position us to meet future challenges as an informed

and committed partnership.

As with nearly every activity associated with joint ventures, this newsletter is an experiment of sorts. With that in mind, I welcome your suggestions to improve the content or presentation of future newsletters.



Jeff Raasch—GCJV Chairman

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[www.gcjv.org](http://www.gcjv.org)

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## In Profile: USGS

Partner investments dictate the success of any Joint Venture (see [desired characteristics of a joint venture partnership](#)). JV activities are broadly categorized into administration, biological planning, conservation design, habitat delivery, monitoring, research, and communication. Shortly after the establishment of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture (GCJV) partnership in 1988, a continually evolving relationship with the United States

Geological Survey's (USGS) National Wetlands Research Center (NWRC) emerged.

Through that evolution, NWRC has become an integral component of the GCJV, contributing to at least three of the key elements that make any JV successful - administration, biological planning, and assumption-driven research.

Since the inception of the GCJV, NWRC has provided support to the partnership in the form of waterbird and wetland research, aerial survey assistance, population modeling, editing and publication of numerous GCJV documents and reports, and generation of spatial data and map products. At least one NWRC scientist has always contributed to biological planning activities through participation on the GCJV's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Team (MERT).

Beginning in 1998, the NWRC stepped up their contributions to the

*Partnership –mutual cooperation and responsibility for the achievement of specified goals*

administration function of the partnership by providing office space for one staff member of the GCJV Office. Since 2004, NWRC has provided the centralized location for all GCJV Office staff. This arrangement has been a significant in-kind contribution to the partnership, has strengthened working relationships between NWRC scientists and GCJV Office staff, and has increased their capacity to impact conservation decisions with the latest science-based findings.

Similarly, the science-based interactions between NWRC and the GCJV have evolved into more collaborative endeavors that address specific needs identified in GCJV planning or evaluation documents. Within this relationship, NWRC scientists and GCJV staff mutually develop appropriate research goals, methodologies, and interpretations, deepening NWRC involvement in assumption-driven research. Two examples of current science collaboration are the evaluation of the assumptions of our shorebird habitat-population model, led by Dr. Clint Jeske, and a study on using Nexrad doppler radar to develop relationships between bird habitat use and landscape habitat variables, led by Dr. Wylie Barrow.

NWRC participation on GCJV technical advisory groups has also expanded, thus strengthening their support of

biological planning. Four NWRC staff sit on advisory groups including the GIS Committee, the Landbird Working Group of MERT, the Waterfowl Working Group of MERT, and the Shorebird Working Group of MERT.

Additionally, 2 scientists of USGS's Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit participate on MERT Working Groups and in research and conservation design that relate directly to GCJV priorities. Dr. Alan Afton has led research on wintering pintails, mallards, and gadwalls, and Dr. Sammy King has led efforts to plan for and study King Rails - both in close collaboration with the GCJV.

The GCJV partnership has benefitted substantially from collaborative science with USGS and will be further strengthened as we continue to move toward the more complex science/management relationship articulated in the July 2006 [Strategic Habitat Conservation \(SHC\)](#) report. This relationship requires close USGS and GCJV familiarity at nearly every element of SHC. Additionally, the need for USGS technical capacity is likely to increase substantially as JVs incorporate climate change into planning, monitoring, and evaluation.



## GCJV Seeks Monitoring Coordinator

The Gulf Coast Joint Venture (GCJV) is seeking a motivated individual to serve as Monitoring Coordinator for the GCJV partnership. The incumbent will be a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee and work as a team member of the GCJV Office at the USGS National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, Louisiana. GCJV Staff, supervised by the GCJV Coordinator, receive broad direction and priorities from the Management Board in furtherance of the bird habitat conservation mission of the partnership.

Applicants should have a Ph.D. or M.S. in wildlife or natural resources ecology and possess specific skills or experience in experimental design, population sampling, and statistical analysis. Preference will be given to candidates with broad expertise and familiarity among bird guilds (i.e., waterfowl, landbirds, waterbirds, and shorebirds) and their varied habitats. Because successful execution of job responsibilities will depend heavily upon involvement and participation of GCJV partners, applicants must also have excellent interpersonal and communication skills.

Interested persons should visit the official job postings at USA Jobs ([current federal employees](#) and [others](#)).

## Meet the Staff: Bill Vermillion - Bird Conservation Specialist

The GCJV office staff is responsible for coordinating bird conservation planning, delivery, and evaluation for the partnership. Bill Vermillion has been part of the GCJV staff since 2005, and has walked a varied path to get here. After graduating from the University of Southwestern Louisiana in 1986 with a B.S. in Zoology-Wildlife Management, the City of Lafayette, Louisiana, hired him as an interpretive naturalist at the Acadiana Park Nature Station where he designed and coordinated an environmental education program for fourth graders. Bill then worked for the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries in Baton Rouge as the Louisiana Natural Heritage Program's Non-game Biologist where he conducted colonial nesting waterbird surveys, coordinated state permitting programs, and conducted various monitoring efforts for a variety of non-game species. In 2001, he moved to the USFWS's Ecological Services (ES) Louisiana Field Office. During his

tenure with ES, Bill's duties included threatened and endangered species consultations, coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding water resource development projects, oil spill response, wetland permit review, and coastal restoration planning.

As GCJV Bird Conservation Specialist, Bill's major duty is development of population and habitat objectives for priority non-waterfowl birds in the GCJV region. Bill also coordinates reviews of National Wetland Conservation Act Grants relative to their value to GCJV priority non-waterfowl birds, works with GCJV partner agencies to plan and implement habitat projects, and works with researchers and biologists from numerous agencies to address information needs required to refine conservation planning. He works closely with other members of the GCJV staff regarding various conservation planning and habitat assessment issues.

"Working with the GCJV Office has been, and remains, very challenging," says Bill. "It has required me to delve into aspects of conservation planning, such as population and habitat modeling, to which I had little prior exposure. I continue to benefit from working with other GCJV staff and partners, where I've had the opportunity to expand my knowledge concerning research design, remote sensing and geospatial analysis, and habitat project design and implementation."

Bill can be reached at 337-266-8813 or [william\\_vermillion@fws.gov](mailto:william_vermillion@fws.gov).



*Bill Vermillion in action.*

## Science In Action: The Basics

We all face the challenges of working with limited time and resources. How then, do we decide which tasks to undertake; which projects to move forward; which habitats to focus on?  
**Let science lead the way!**

The GCJV uses sound, constantly-evolving scientific information to prioritize conservation efforts and to develop the most efficient habitat delivery possible. This biological planning is typically led by GCJV Office staff, aided by other members of the GCJV Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Team (MERT) and other partners. The MERT maintains the integrity of the biological foundations of regional bird conservation plans endorsed by the GCJV Management Board, reviews habitat conservation proposals for consistency with regional bird conservation plans, and provides technical guidance regarding habitat and population monitoring.

MERT working groups employ the following steps in biological planning for bird habitat conservation along the Gulf Coast:

### **Identify target species or species-groups**

### **Determine limiting factors**

### **Develop strategies to mitigate limiting factors**

**Quantify objectives with biological models** – To begin estimating and refining how much, what kind, and where habitat is needed to achieve population objectives, models are constructed to describe what is known about the relationship between bird species and habitats, and to depict expected population response to changes in habitat variables.

**Identify testable assumptions** – Because conservation efforts must advance in the face of incomplete knowledge, the GCJV works in concert with Gulf Coast universities and partner organizations to design and undertake research and monitoring to address the critical assumptions on which population and habitat objectives are based, and to evaluate management outcomes.

For example, the GCJV has identified stilt sandpipers as a species of interest and worked towards developing a habitat model to support a target population of 96,000 birds during fall migration. The model suggests 3,231 hectares of appropriate habitat be available from 15 July through 5 November to support the target population. An additional 4,811 ha are needed to support other shorebird species which are potential competitors with stilt sandpipers. Habitat needs are based upon a model that includes several assumptions, such as shorebird caloric requirements, food selection, food quality, and food replenishment rates, though little information exists to verify these assumptions. Consequently, the GCJV and partners are conducting a study on areas under different field management regimes to determine shorebird food (i.e., invertebrate) abundance and use by stilt sandpipers, and to correlate stilt sandpiper use with invertebrate populations.

Results from research and monitoring feed directly back into the GCJV conservation planning and evaluation loop, enabling population and habitat objectives to be continually adjusted as needed. This constant feedback ensures that the conservation actions of GCJV partners can proceed with imperfect knowledge, decisions are made using the best science available, research resources can be deployed efficiently, and we continue to improve the basis for our conservation decisions. . [\(more\)](#)

# 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):

- **Flying J Ranch Conservation Project** - Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation was granted \$1 million to address the protection of a 1,900-acre working farm in Vermillion Parish in southwest La.
- **Pointe-aux-Chenes – Grand Bayou I** – Ducks Unlimited was awarded \$1 million to address the restoration of 3,180 acres of estuarine intertidal marsh on public and private lands within Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes in southeast Louisiana.
- **Coastal Prairie Wetlands Restoration/Acquisition III** – Katy Prairie Conservancy was granted \$850,000 to address the acquisition, restoration and/or enhancement of 5,035 acres of wetlands and associated uplands within portions of the Texas Mid-Coast and Chenier Plain in Harris, Waller, Brazoria, Matagorda, and Chambers Counties.
- **Louisiana Coastal Wetlands V** - \$1 million was granted to Ducks Unlimited to address the protection and restoration of 3,040 acres of estuarine intertidal marsh in Cameron and Vermillion Parishes in southwestern Louisiana, through marsh terracing and a conservation easement.

The following **NAWCA Small Grants** have been approved by the NAWCC and MBCC:

- **Sheldon Lake State Park Coastal Prairie Wetland Restoration II** - \$75,000 was awarded to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, State Parks Division to address the restoration of 133 acres of coastal prairie habitat in Harris County, Texas.
- **GCJV Mottled Duck Conservation Plan Initiative III** - a \$50,000 grant was awarded to Texas R.I.C.E. to construct and restore approximately 340 acres of wetland/moist soil units and to restore 3,500 acres of native prairie on the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge in Brazoria County, Texas.

## 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.

We're on the web!

[www.gcjv.org](http://www.gcjv.org)

## GULF COAST JOINT VENTURE

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