

## BACKGROUND

One of the original waterfowl Joint Ventures formed under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan in 1988, the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV) has evolved both geographically and conceptually from its original delineated boundaries in 1988 ([Figure 3](#)) to include the 17 Atlantic Flyway states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico ([Figure 3](#)). With these expanded boundaries came expanded responsibilities for the conservation of waterfowl and other wetland associated species. During this period of ACJV growth, several other bird conservation initiatives had begun planning at various scales. These initiatives included Partners in Flight (Pashley et al. 2000), United States Shorebird Conservation Plan (Brown et al. 2001), and the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas (Kushlan et al. 2002). These initiatives developed continental, national or regional plans that addressed species population and habitat priorities and goals.

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative ([NABCI](#)) was established to integrate the common goals and objectives of these initiatives and create a more efficient mechanism for the delivery of bird conservation (U.S. NABCI Committee 2000). Ecological planning units known as Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) were developed by NABCI to help planning within physiographic regions of similar habitat types and bird species composition. Also, other single species bird conservation initiatives have been or are being developed for Northern Bobwhite (Dimmick et al. 2002), Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallapavo*) (Dave Wilson pers. comm.), and American Woodcock (James R. Kelley pers. comm.).

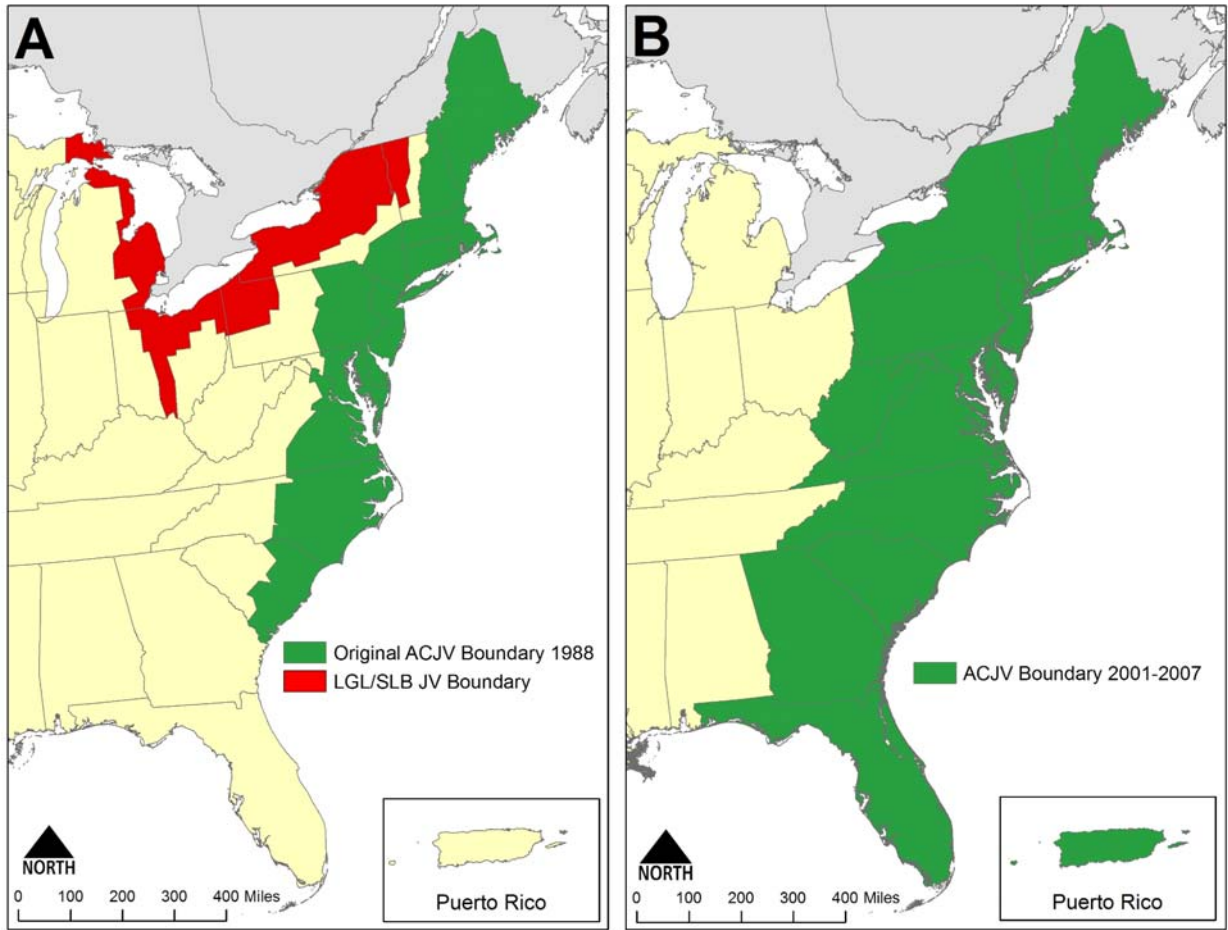


Figure 3. Administrative Boundaries of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. Original boundary circa 1988 (Panel A), 2001-2007 boundary (Panel B), and current boundary (Panel C).

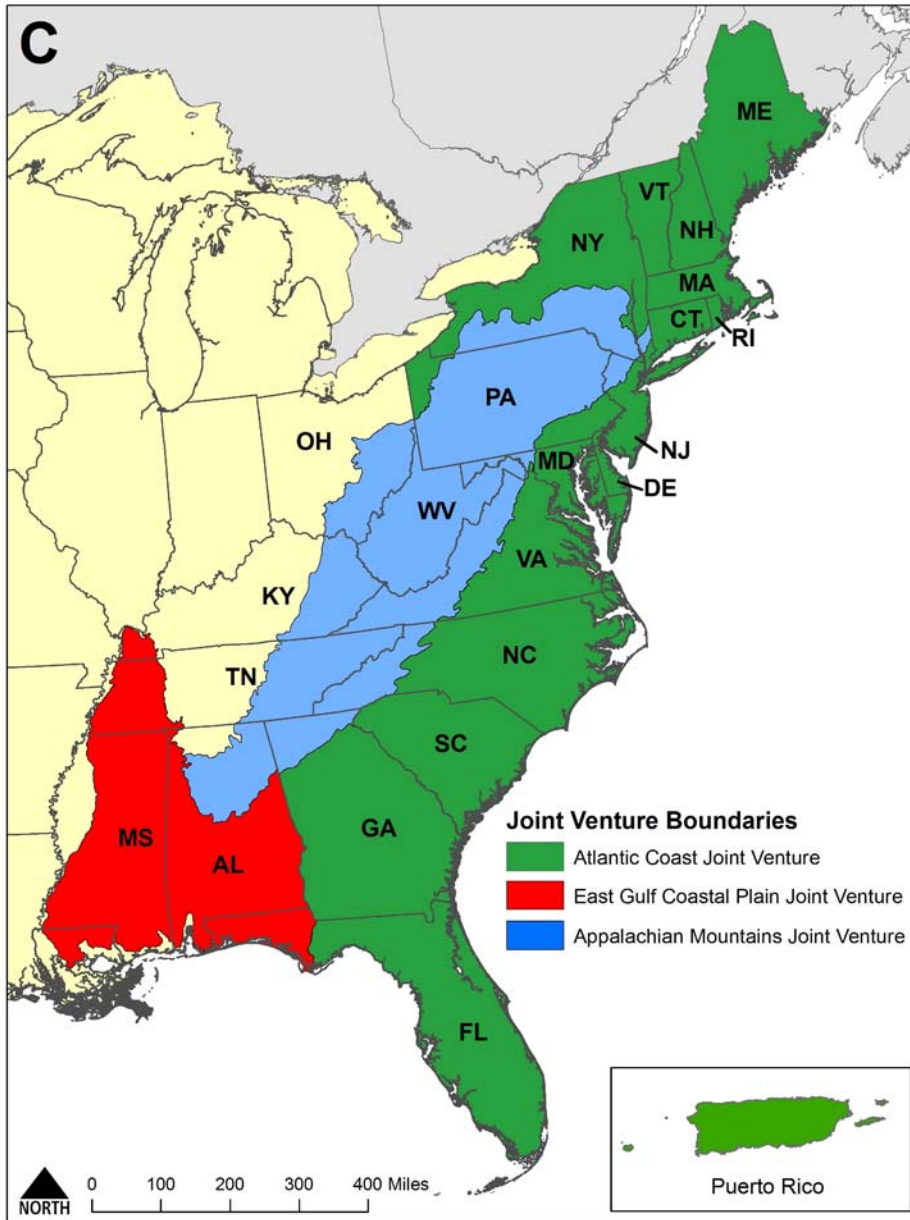


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In March 1999, the Management Board of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture unanimously adopted and embraced the framework of NABCI to deliver conservation of “all birds across all habitats.” The ACJV was the first NAWMP Joint Venture to officially begin planning efforts under the framework of NABCI. The first effort of this integrated bird conservation planning vision within the ACJV began in 1999 in the eastern portion of the Southeastern Coastal Plain Bird Conservation Region (BCR 27). Two workshops were

held in 1999 to begin the process of integrated bird conservation in BCR 27. A third meeting was held in February 2000.

## **APPROACH AND PLANNING PROCESS**

In May 1999, members of the Management Board requested staff of the ACJV to plan and conduct an integrated bird conservation planning in the southeast, initially focusing on Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Approximately 45 land managers, biologists, scientists, administrators, and planners representing interests of five states (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia), including federal, state, non-governmental, and private entities, and with expertise in waterfowl, shorebird, landbird, and waterbird conservation met in June 1999 near Garnett, South Carolina to begin the process of integrated bird planning and implementation.

The objectives of the workshop were to: 1) develop population and habitat objectives for priority species, 2) delineate “all bird” focus areas, 3) identify priority species and habitats, 4) develop projects for implementation, and 5) develop a long term dynamic framework for integrated bird conservation planning in BCR 27. This initiative became known as the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI). Because the ACJV administratively encompasses only a portion of BCR 27, the planning area was limited to the coastal plain of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, although a small portion of Alabama is ecologically included in this region, and is therefore shown on all maps of the SAMBI planning area ([Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)).

The first workshop opened with reports on the status of bird conservation planning for each of the major bird initiatives, followed by presentations on several different approaches to developing population and habitat objectives for shorebirds and waterfowl in the United States. The purpose of these presentations were to provide information about the ACJV, the status and evolution of bird conservation planning in the United States and North America, and demonstrate that a vision of integrated bird conservation could become a reality through a coordinated effort. All sessions, breakout and plenary, were conducted with a facilitator. To prepare for the first workshop, all attendees were briefed concerning information and materials needed to conduct a successful workshop. The structure of the first workshop centered on breakout groups by state, with experts in waterfowl, landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds, present. Other attendees with interests in a particular state were free to attend and participate in assisting each breakout group with development of its objectives. Attendees with interests in all states, both biologically and administratively, attended multiple breakout sessions, providing input for each group’s assigned tasks. These groups, known as State Working Groups, became the fundamental planning and implementation body for SAMBI. Technical personnel from each state were collectively called the BCR Technical Committee. In the first workshop, the primary objectives of the breakout groups were to:

- 1) delineate “all bird” focus areas,
- 2) develop strategic population and habitat objectives for each major bird group or at least representative or high priority species within each bird group,

- 3) identify preliminary projects for implementation and
- 4) develop an outline for a long term framework for bird conservation in the South Atlantic Coastal Plain.

During this process, State Working Groups were asked to identify information gaps and needs relative to developing habitat and population objectives for BCR 27. Additionally, the entire group was asked to express their hopes and concerns about the meeting's purpose, and their vision for what this effort might be if successful. After the breakout and general sessions were complete, an open discussion was held on the process undertaken at this meeting, noting comments on how the process could be improved. In closing the first workshop, action items and future activities were identified by the larger group.

The second workshop was held on November 4-5, 1999, in Greensboro, North Carolina. The structure of the second workshop was different from the first. There were no breakout sessions, meeting attendance was reduced, and attendees were comprised mostly of technical personnel. The primary focus of the second meeting was to report and present to the group the completion of action items from the first workshop, prioritize habitats and species, prioritize habitat conservation needs, prioritize projects by state, develop research needs, and begin developing a project to be submitted to the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) for funding. Action items for the group and each State Working Groups were generated at the end of the workshop.

A third meeting was held on January 19, 2000, in St. Petersburg, Florida. The primary purpose of this meeting was solely devoted to developing a multi-state, multi-project proposal to be submitted for funding through NAWCA using a new integrated framework of bird conservation planning in the southeastern United States.

## **State Working Groups**

Because it is difficult for conservationists from all five states to meet on a regular basis, it became logical to develop State Workings Groups to coordinate planning and implementation at the state level, and to coordinate activities between the five states. State Working Groups have local knowledge of resources, existing partnerships, threats to the landscape, and strategies to achieve conservation at the state level, and thus, became the basic functional unit of SAMBI to plan and implement the conservation of "all birds across all habitats." State Working Groups can develop and network more extensive partnerships than the large group, making the delivery of bird habitat conservation more efficient at the state level. Each State Working Groups consists of federal, state, NGO, and private interests with knowledge of the major bird initiatives and with expertise in planning, implementation, and developing partnerships. State Working Groups continue to meet on their own to develop projects, refine biological planning, and develop partnerships. State Working Groups have been critical to the success of SAMBI.

## **Setting Population and Habitat Objectives**

Population and/or habitat objectives were derived for many of the priority species of each major bird initiative based upon existing national and regional plans (Pashley et al. 2000, Hunter et al. 2001, Brown et al. 2001, Hunter et al. 2002, Kushlan et al. 2002), bird initiative workshops, and local/regional knowledge and expertise. These regional plans are quite detailed in objectives for both population and habitat for many of the high priority species. Because the SAMBI planning area is similar to the same planning area or area of geographic importance for priority species in these plans, objectives outlined in these plans are directly applicable to SAMBI.

Similar objectives for waterfowl are now being developed in a regional plan, and current objectives for waterfowl within the ACJV are area based and categorized by state and focus area (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1988b). Factors influencing existing waterfowl objectives have significantly changed since 1988, warranting a revision of the current ACJV Implementation Plan and its objectives. For SAMBI, the Noffsinger method (Noffsinger 1999, unpubl.) was used to calculate waterfowl objectives by state (Balkcom pers. comm., Harrigal pers. comm., Luszcz pers. comm.). The Noffsinger method is a modified calculation of the bioenergetics model that was used in the Mississippi Alluvial Plain to calculate both waterfowl and shorebird objectives (Loesch et al. 2000).

The SAMBI BCR Technical Committee also developed habitat and/or population objectives for species they felt important but that were not specifically addressed in regional plans. Additionally, they adjusted existing population and habitat objectives for some priority species to better address local conservation needs. Finally, State Working Groups of the BCR Technical Committee stepped down regional objectives to state objectives for certain species. For example, the goal for Swallow-Tailed Kite in the Partners In Flight Bird Conservation Plan for the South Atlantic Coastal Plain (SACP) is to provide eight patches of at least 40,500 ha of bottomland hardwood forests. However, this plan does not indicate where in the SACP these large forest patches should be distributed. State Working Groups evaluated the availability and potential of such habitat within their respective states and assigned a portion of these eight patches to individual states. As an example, Georgia and South Carolina allocated, respectively, two and three patches of the recommended eight patches to their states in specific areas, thus targeting these areas for conservation. Additionally, by allocating these patches to their states, the Swallow-tailed Kite goal also incorporated goals for Wayne's Black-throated Green Warbler and Swainson's Warbler where the breeding ranges of these species overlap.

## **Boundaries of the Planning Area**

The planning area or boundary for the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI) is the eastern portion of Bird Conservation Region (BCR) 27, the Southeastern Coastal Plain ([Figure 1](#)). The northernmost boundary in Virginia and the southeastern most boundary in Florida have been modified since the original boundaries of BCRs were delineated. These changes resulted from bird conservation partners in each of these states

recognizing that the boundaries needed to be adjusted to reflect bird conservation priorities. Additionally, the majority of the western portion of BCR 27 is not addressed in this plan because the ACJV has no administrative responsibilities west of current boundary of the planning region.

This large and diverse area encompasses the coastal plain of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, the western boundary being the Fall Line that marks the transition between the coastal plain and the hilly piedmont. The northern boundary lies in southeast Virginia and is delineated by the watershed boundary between the Chowan River Basin and the Lower James River Basin which includes the Great Dismal Swamp and Back Bay National Wildlife Refuges. The southeastern boundary is in northeastern Florida, and is a transitional zone into Peninsular Florida, where coastal plain plant communities become dominated by tropical plant communities, such as black mangrove and scrub communities. This southernmost boundary generally is just south of Fort Matanzas National Monument on the Atlantic Coast, north up the Matanzas River, westward through St. Johns County south of St. Augustine, westward through Clay County, running through the northern portion of Camp Blanding and Gold Head Branch State Park, then north of Gainesville, Florida, and south to a point,

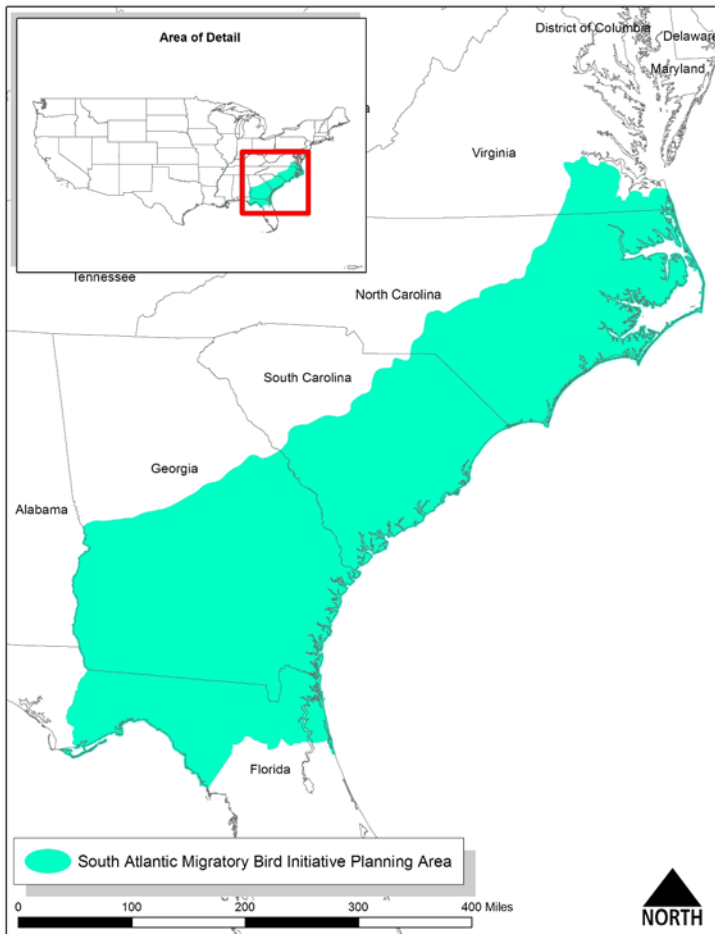


Figure 1. Planning Area for the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI)

approximately midway between the Lower Suwanee National Wildlife Refuge and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. The Gulf of Mexico forms the remaining segment of the southern boundary. The westernmost boundary is the Georgia-Alabama border south down through the center of the Apalachicola River Basin to the Gulf of Mexico. Portions of the southern and eastern boundaries of southeastern coastal plain are the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean respectively, but the SAMBI planning area extends well offshore to include parts of the Southeast U.S. Continental Shelf (BCR 77) and the near shore waters of the Gulf of Mexico pelagic BCR (74) ([Figure 2](#)). The waters addressed in this plan include all coastal offshore waters adjacent to the terrestrial portion of the SAMBI planning area in the Gulf of Mexico and waters of the Atlantic Ocean that extend to and beyond the Gulf Stream where high priority oceanic birds inhabit. The remainder of BCR 27 not addressed in this plan largely encompasses the East Gulf Coastal Plain (EGCP) physiographic area and will be addressed in future planning efforts ([Figure 2](#)). Similar planning efforts are ongoing for this new Joint Venture.

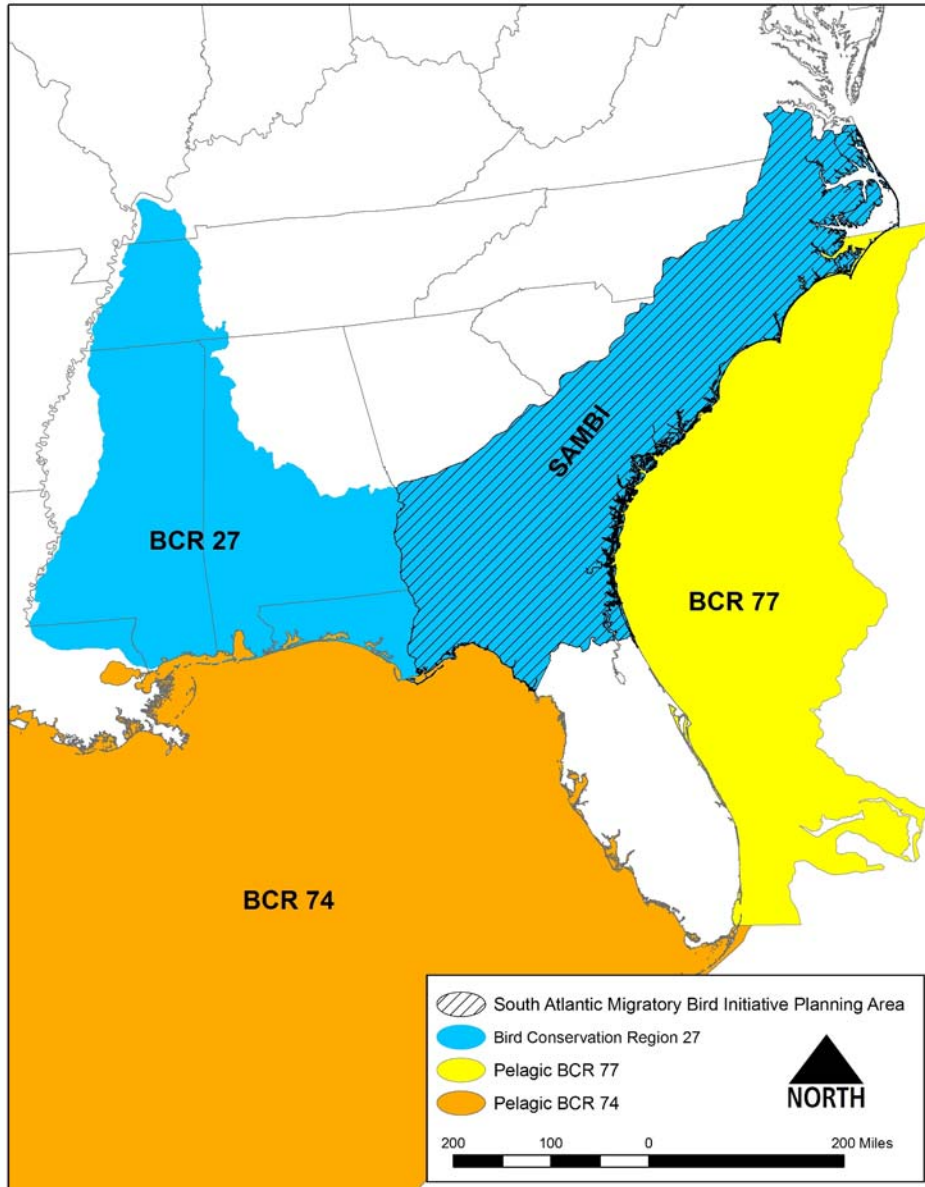


Figure 2. Pelagic Bird Conservation Regions (74 – Gulf of Mexico, 77- Southeast U.S. Continental Shelf), the SAMBI Planning Region, and the East Gulf Coastal Plain.