

Atlantic Coast Joint Venture News

Partners working together for the conservation of native bird species in the Atlantic Flyway region of the United States.

Spring 2009

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Thirty-four North American Wetland Conservation Act Grants Receive Approval in Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Council in March 2008 selected 15 small grant projects providing \$979,186 to eleven states in the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV). Project partners in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia matched the grants with over \$11.5 million. Over 9,300 acres of important habitats for migratory birds will be protected through fee acquisition, conservation easements, restoration, and enhancement.



*Zemko Sawmill Preserve Project, Salem, CT
Photo courtesy of Salem Land Trust Inc.*

Also in March, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) approved 10 additional [North American Wetland Conservation](#)

[Act](#) standard grant projects from the ACJV that had been recommended by the Council in December adding to the nine ACJV Standard grants approved in September. Project partners in Florida, Georgia, Maine, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, and Virginia matched \$9.5 million in grant funds with nearly \$33 million in partner funds to protect, enhance, and restore 45,587 acres of vital migratory bird habitat.

In total for fiscal year 2009, there were 19 standard and 15 small NAWCA grants funded in the ACJV to protect, restore, and enhance over 77,569 acres with \$18.2 million in grant funds and over \$76.4 million in matching funds.

In addition to NAWCA grants, nine [National Coastal Wetland Conservation Grants](#) were awarded for more than \$7.48 million to six states in the Atlantic Flyway for projects in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maine, New Jersey, and Virginia. State resource agencies and other project partners contributed over \$8 million in matching funds for the federal grants, to conserve, restore, and protect over 4,817 acres of coastal wetlands.

[View NAWCA Small Grant Projects](#)

[View NAWCA Standard Grants](#)

[View FY 2008 Coastal Grant Projects](#)

[View FY 2008 Coastal Grant Projects](#)



ACJV Fiscal Year 2009 Projects with Waterfowl Focus Areas



*Learn more about the
Atlantic Coast Joint Venture
program.*

Partnerships Define The ACJV & Nature Conservancy's Work in the Winyah Bay and Pee Dee River Basin in 2008

Flowing through cypress swamps, historic ricefields, long-leaf pine forests and estuarine wetlands, the slow moving waters of the Black, Big Pee Dee, Little Pee Dee, Sampit and Waccamaw rivers converge along the coast of Georgetown County, South Carolina to form the third largest estuarine drainage area on the Eastern Seaboard—Winyah Bay. A 525,000-acre project area, The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Winyah Bay and Pee Dee River Basin Project Area boasts the state's largest tidal freshwater wetland system; extensive cypress-tupelo swamps; more than 66 songbird species; 12,000 acres of mature longleaf pine forest; and over 100 fish species and 30 mussel species in Pee Dee River.

Recognizing the vital importance of these areas, the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture partners identified the Winyah Bay, Little Pee Dee-Lumber River, and Great Pee Dee-Lynches River Focus Areas as critical for conserving wetland resources in this region of South Carolina. Conservation leaders in the Winyah Bay Focus Area formed a Task Force to assist in coordinating and identifying priority areas for conservation within the Focus Area.

At the heart of protection in the project area is the 9,000-acre Sandy Island Preserve, the largest undeveloped freshwater island along the east coast. In 1997, through a unique partnership between the Winyah Bay Task Force, the South Carolina Department of Transportation and other environmental organizations, Sandy Island was saved from development and purchased for permanent protection and placed under TNC's management. Today, protection through the broad partnership of the Winyah Bay Task Force continues to define the Winyah Bay landscape.

In 2008, TNC, along with conservation partners, completed three complex land protection projects in and around Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge. The acquisition projects will expand the land under the Refuge's ownership/management from 18,620 to 22,931 acres, while private conservation easements completed in 2008 serve as an invaluable buffer for the Refuge. The newly protected tracts will complement the 50,700 acres previously protected by the TNC in the project area through public and private partnerships.

Haulover Tract- 2008 Migratory Bird Conservation Act Funding

In November 2007, TNC acquired the 1,292 acre Haulover tract as a cooperative purchase for the Refuge. Prior to the purchase, the Conservancy worked with the Natural Resource Conservation Service in implementing a large Wetlands Reserve Program easement on the Haulover tract and an adjacent property totaling 2,642 acres. Downstream, along the Pee Dee River are a network of protected properties including the Refuge, Sandy Island Preserve, and Brookgreen Gardens. The 25,668



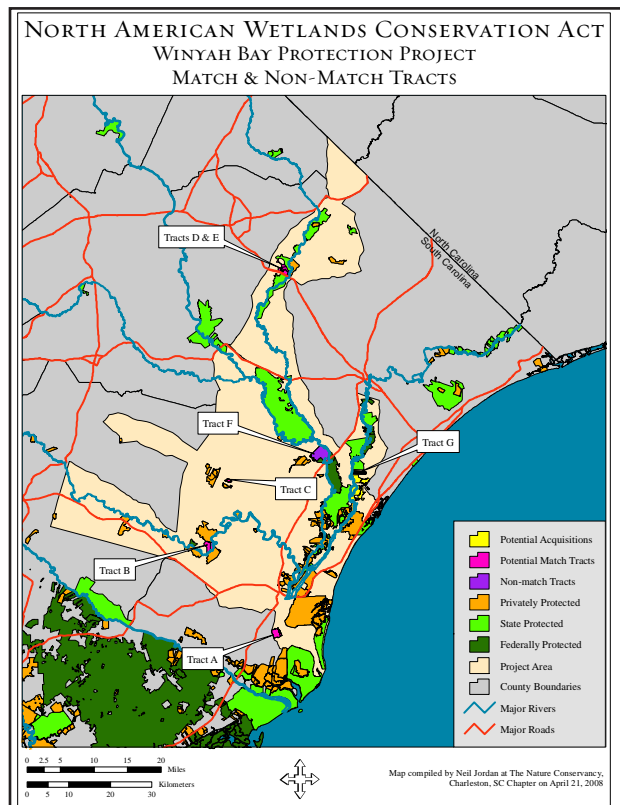
Waccamaw River. Photo courtesy of Neil Jordan, SC TNC



I'm singing in the rain.....Photo courtesy of Bill Majoros



The Haulover Tract property consists primarily of bottomland hardwood forests, including bald cypress, cypress tupelo, red maple and a diversity of oak species. This habitat supports abundant waterfowl and is important nesting habitat for the state-endangered Swallow-tailed Kite (above). Photo courtesy of Todd Schneider



Winyah Bay Protection NAWCA Projects and Match Parcels



Little Blue Heron. Photo courtesy of Larry Masters

acre Woodbury Tract, which TNC worked to protect in 2006 with the Conservation Fund and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, is upstream from this project site. The permanent protection of the Haulover tract plays a critical role in the broader conservation of this important corridor along the Pee Dee River.

Plantersville Conservation Easements

During summer and fall 2008, TNC and Pee Dee Land Trust completed a project just south of the Haulover Tract to protect more than 640 acres in the Plantersville community in Georgetown County, SC. Grants and awards from WWW Foundation, Grissom Parkway Mitigation Group, and the South Carolina Environmental Law Project collectively made the project possible. The Plantersville area is nationally recognized for its historic and ecological significance. Landowners in the Plantersville community and adjacent lands on the east side of the Pee Dee River have voluntarily protected 8,263 acres through conservation easements. Many Plantersville landowners have also engaged in stewardship of their protected lands by implementing prescribed burning programs, invasive species control, and wildlife habitat improvements.

2008 NAWCA - Winyah Bay Protection Program

In August 2008, TNC submitted a standard grant through the NAWCA Grant program to acquire two tracts along the Waccamaw River. In March 2009, The MBCC announced final approval of the \$1,000,000 grant for acquisition of 580 acres along the Waccamaw River to be transferred for inclusion in the Refuge.

Conservation partners offering match for the grant in the form of donated and bargain-purchased conservation easements included Ducks Unlimited, Pee Dee Land Trust, SC Conservation Bank, and the Lowcountry Open Land Trust. In total, the project match and grant tracts included 7 parcels in the Winyah River Basin, totaling 3,436 acres, including 2,264 wetland acres and 1,228 acres of associated uplands to benefit breeding, migrating, and wintering birds.

Looking back over the past year, The Nature Conservancy, Winyah Bay Task Force, and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture partners are celebrating the work completed in 2008 and are working hard to preserve the momentum for another landmark year in 2009.

Southeast Quail Study Group Becomes National Bobwhite Technical Committee

The Southeast Quail Study Group held its 15th annual meeting March 24-26, 2009 in Columbia, South Carolina, as a joint meeting with Southeast Partners in Flight. More than 165 participants representing state and wildlife agencies, private conservation organizations and other partners participated in this landmark meeting for bobwhite quail and grassland bird conservation. As a result of this meeting the group decided to change the name of the group to the National Bobwhite Technical Committee. This name change, and the associated expansion of group membership, is a positive change resulting from the expanded interest in bobwhite quail conservation across the range of the species and the past success of the Southeast Quail Study Group and the implementation of the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative.

The Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, originally drafted in 2002, is a comprehensive plan for the recovery and restoration of bobwhites. Originally covering portions of 22 states in the Southeast, the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative is currently being revised to include all states within the range of Northern Bobwhite.

The Southeast Quail Study Group was formed in 1995 and has become a nationally recognized force in the conservation and restoration of bobwhite quail habitat. Working with partners like Southeast Partners in Flight, the Southeast Quail Study Group has helped to establish beneficial practices in U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs like the Conservation Reserve Program. Practice CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds, was originally presented as a joint initiative of Southeast Quail Study Group and Southeast Partners in Flight, and has resulted in the establishment of more than 210,000 acres of high-quality bobwhite quail and grassland bird habitat in working agricultural landscapes.



Bottomland hardwood forests. Photo courtesy of South Florida Water Management District



Northern Bobwhite. USFWS photo

For more information on the National Bobwhite Technical Committee or the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, contact [Billy Dukes](#) at 803/734-3939.



*Habitat enhancement project.
Photo courtesy of NWTF*

Upcoming meetings of the Joint Venture:

Summer Meetings
ACJV Waterfowl
Technical Committee
July 21, 2009
Prince Edward Island, Canada

ACJV Nongame Technical
Bird Committee
July 21, 2009
Prince Edward Island, Canada

ACJV Management Board
Summer Meeting
July 24, 2009
Prince Edward Island, Canada

Similar to the Southeast Quail Study Group, the National Bobwhite Technical Committee will maintain a focused, problem-solving approach to bobwhite conservation, with efforts directed toward improving agricultural conservation policy for the benefit of bobwhites and grassland birds, as well as seeking landscape-level opportunities for strategic bobwhite habitat conservation and delivery.

National Wild Turkey Federation Unveils North American Wild Turkey Management Plan

Since 1973, the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and its dedicated volunteers have worked with wildlife agencies to help successfully restore wild turkey populations in nearly all suitable habitat in North America. As the need to trap and transfer wild turkeys becomes less necessary, it is critically important to look toward the future of North America's greatest game birds and work to make sure that future is bright.

The NWTF's staff, grassroots volunteers, and agency partners have been working together to write the next chapter in the wild turkey success story: The Wild Turkey Management Plan (The Plan). The Plan will not only ensure the continued success of the wild turkey, but at the same time it will improve habitat for a multitude of wildlife and plant species, while also focusing on providing more opportunities and access for North America's hunters.



*Turkeys. Photo courtesy of Maslowski/
National Wild Turkey Federation*

The Plan is a compilation of plans that cover the United States, all Canadian provinces home to wild turkeys and selected areas of Mexico, providing guidance to wildlife management agencies and the NWTF's dedicated volunteers to target the most important habitat needs in their areas. The Plan will be dynamic and adaptable by constantly monitoring progress; balancing the social needs of people with the biological needs of wildlife; providing accurate and relevant science-based support for wild turkey management; and conserving the flora, fauna and habitat that define its world. Additionally, The plan will also identify areas that NWTF's state and local chapters can help fund projects to improve wildlife habitat and increase hunter access.

For years, the NWTF has worked to improve access to hunting lands with great success. At both local and national levels, the NWTF and its volunteers have developed partnerships with landowners, and worked with state and federal agencies to help improve hunter access. As part of The Plan, the NWTF will continue to fight for increased hunter access through the More Places to Hunt initiative.

The Federation's chapters have already experienced tremendous success in affecting hunter access in a variety of ways, including significant land acquisitions such as those in South Carolina, Iowa, Ohio, West Virginia and North Carolina; funding conservation easements that provide public access in Montana; funding a walk-in hunting area program in Kansas; holding landowner appreciation days in Wisconsin; and being actively involved in legislative issues.

The NWTF will continue to work with Joint Venture, state wildlife agencies, the USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and numerous other partners to maintain turkey habitat on millions of acres of public and private properties across North America.

[View The Wild Turkey Management Plan](#)

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Announces Two New Keystone Initiatives

The [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#) (The Foundation) has recently added to its Keystone Initiatives portfolio, a collection of targeted, strategic investments aimed at reversing the declines of species of high national conservation importance. The Southeastern Grasslands Keystone Initiative and the Early Successional Forest Keystone Initiative are two of several new additions identified by NFWF. The Foundation has worked with partners to assemble a draft business plan that will guide its future financial support.



Blue Grosbeak. Photo courtesy of Darlene Moore



Singing Dickey. Photo courtesy of Les Brooks



Bobolink. Photo courtesy of Darlene Moore



Early successional habitat. USFWS photo

The Southeastern Grasslands Keystone Initiative focuses on the grass-dominated ecosystems in the southeastern United States that support more than a dozen high priority bird species, including Northern Bobwhite, Loggerhead Shrike, Henslow's Sparrows, and Field Sparrows. Focal habitats include forage-based agricultural lands and forested grasslands such as stands of longleaf and shortleaf pine, and shrubby transitional habitats. The plan emphasizes support in building capacity of the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative through which much of the on-the-ground habitat management of the Keystone Initiative will be coordinated.

The Early Successional Forest Keystone Initiative focuses on the earliest stages of forest regeneration, often dominated by grasses, shrubs, and saplings. High priority, target species include the American Woodcock, Golden-winged Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler and other declining bird species that are dependent upon these transitional habitats. While these species range throughout much of eastern North America, emphasis of the Keystone initiative will be placed initially on northeastern and midwestern United States, southeastern Canada, the Appalachian Mountain region, and focal regions of Central and South America where some of these species overwinter. The plan emphasizes support in building capacity to provide technical guidance to public and private landowners with a desire or mandate to manage forestlands. That guidance is intended to help ensure that forest management practices are maximizing the environmental and biological values of the land, while still affording landowners an opportunity to generate significant economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits.

The Foundation is prepared to commit significant funds to help meet the priority needs of these new Initiatives. Future financial support of the Initiatives will be evaluated annually, based upon progress towards the business plan's bird population and other goals. The business plan and information regarding grant opportunities can be found at www.nfwf.org after May 15, 2009.

Joint Venture Bill Introduced in Congress

Representative Frank Kratovil, Jr. representing the first district of Maryland along with co-sponsors Representative Henry E. Brown, Jr. of South Carolina, Representative Ron Kind of Wisconsin and Representative Robert J. Wittman of Virginia introduced a bill titled "Joint Ventures for Bird Habitat Conservation Act of 2009" (H.R. 2188). The purpose of the bill is to authorize the Secretary of the Interior, through the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to conduct a Joint Venture Program to protect, restore, enhance, and manage migratory bird populations, their habitats, and the ecosystems they rely on, through voluntary actions on public and private lands, and for other purposes. The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources for consideration. The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and joint ventures across the country appreciate the recognition and support of these members of Congress.

Partnering to Protect Shorebirds and Seabirds in Florida

Protecting nesting shorebirds and seabirds in Florida is no small task. Although Florida's coastline stretches nearly 1,200 statute miles, 13 million Floridians reside in coastal counties and around 50 million tourists visit Florida annually to vacation on the beaches. Consequently, Florida's shorebirds and seabirds have few places left to go due to widespread coastal development. Where habitat remains, birds often contend with disturbance from other human activities such as recreation.



*American Oystercatcher with chick.
Photo courtesy of Jack Rogers*

Realizing that the conservation and management of these species is beyond the reach of any one agency or organization, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) relies extensively upon a growing and diverse network of partners to help address these issues.

Target species of the network include: American Oystercatcher, Snowy Plover, Wilson's Plover, Willet, Least Tern, Roseate Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Sooty Tern, Bridled Tern, Brown Noddy, Sandwich Tern, Royal Tern, Caspian Tern, Black Skimmer, Laughing Gull, and Masked Booby.

Most partners within the network are organized into local and/or regional partnerships that regularly coordinate monitoring and management efforts to ensure important shorebird/seabird sites within their respective areas are adequately protected. Although the network's extent is not comprehensive for Florida, most gaps occur in places with few birds. Actions undertaken by partners/partnerships at the local level include the following:

- **Pre-posting:** creating buffer zones with signs, posts, and symbolic fencing around historic or potential nesting sites.
- **Posting:** same as above, but for active nests or colonies. Posting is the minimum protection afforded to most sites and is absolutely critical in reducing disturbance.
- **Stewards Program:** volunteers watch over nests/colonies generally during busy weekends and holidays to educate the public about the importance of shorebirds/seabirds and discourage people from entering posted sites.
- **Survey and monitoring:** scoping surveys are performed at historic and potential sites, and repeated monitoring is conducted at sites with active nests/colonies. Since 2005, partners have entered their data into a centralized online database managed by [FWC](#). A report summarizing the data from 2005-2008 can be found on the [Florida Bird Conservation Initiative \(FBCI\) website](#). In addition, partners participate in annual statewide surveys such as the Florida Snowy Plover Survey organized by the Florida Snowy Plover Working Group.

Recently, a statewide partnership became more formalized with the creation of the Florida Shorebird Alliance (FSA). By connecting the various local and regional partners/partnerships, FSA will increase information exchange (i.e. sharing experiences and ideas), improve coordination across broader scales, and enable more consistency in monitoring and management. In 2007, FWC formed a new position, the Shorebird Partnership Coordinator, to help facilitate this effort. FSA materials (signs, info pamphlets, etc.) can be found on the FBCI website by using the aforementioned link.

For more information about shorebird and seabird conservation efforts in Florida, contact [Chris Burney](#) or 863/648-3200.



Oystercatcher scrape with eggs. Photo courtesy of Patrick Leary



Piping Plover chick. Photo courtesy of Richard Kuzminski

Another New Arrival to the ACJV Family



Congratulations to Kirsten Luke, ACJV GIS Specialist and Max McCord on the arrival of their daughter, Anna Marie McCord, April 9, 2009.

Grant Proposal Deadlines:

North American Wetlands
Conservation Act
Standard Grants
July 31, 2009

National Fish and Wildlife
Foundation
Deadlines Vary
Check Website

Neotropical Migratory Bird
Conservation Act
November 2009

North American Wetlands
Conservation Act Small Grants
October 29, 2009

National Coastal Wetland
Conservation Grants
June 26, 2009

Florida Scrub Jay Conservation

As the only bird species endemic to Florida, the threatened Florida Scrub-jay is unique among Florida's avifauna. Also unique is the Scrub-jay's habitat: the xeric, shrubby, pyrogenic natural communities referred to as scrub and scrubby flatwoods are among the most interesting and imperiled in peninsular Florida. More than 80% of Scrub-jay habitat has been lost to development and agriculture over the past century. Despite protection of approximately three-quarters of remaining scrub and scrubby flatwoods, Scrub-jays have continued to decline throughout the state largely due to habitat degradation from decades of fire suppression.



Florida Scrub-jay. Photo courtesy of Bill Majoros

Fortunately, a diverse array of public agencies and private organizations are teaming up to recover the species through a combination of habitat restoration, management, and monitoring. Aiding in these efforts are The Nature Conservancy's Lake Wales Ridge Prescribed Fire Strike Team and the recently established Northeast Florida Resource Management Support Team. These roving teams assist land managers from county, state, and federal agencies as well as private organizations. The Lake Wales Ridge Team has helped managers restore close to 10,000 acres of scrub and scrubby flatwoods annually over the past 10 years. The teams are a prime example of successful partnering among public agencies and private organizations.

Florida's regional scrub working groups provide another example of partnerships that benefit Scrub-jays and their habitat. Established in 1991, the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Working Group is the oldest of six regional groups. The remaining five groups started in just the last three years and now cover the entire range of the Scrub-jay. Scrub working groups provide land managers and other partners the opportunity to share information, techniques, and experiences regarding scrub restoration and management. Additionally, participants can identify areas for collaboration and can coordinate management, monitoring, education, and private lands conservation on a regional scale.

Many land managers lack the resources to effectively monitor the response of Scrub-jays to habitat restoration and management. The Nature Conservancy's Jay Watch program has stepped in to help fill this need. Jay Watch is a citizen science program that recruits volunteers for annual monitoring of scrub-jays on both public and private lands. Jay Watch began as a limited effort on the Lake Wales Ridge in 2002 but expanded to include 67 sites in 14 counties by 2008. The program helps managers from over 20 agencies track Scrub-jay population trends and responses to management.

Overcoming challenges to conserving Scrub-jays will increasingly require cooperation and coordination among agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private partners. Fire strike teams, scrub working groups, and the Jay Watch program provide excellent examples of how partnerships can benefit this imperiled species and its habitat.



Restoring habitat with fire. Photo courtesy of Steve Morrison

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ACJV Committee Member Receives National Award

Laurel Moore Barnhill, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Bird Conservation Coordinator, received the 2008 National Leadership Award from Partners in Flight for her leadership at both the national and regional levels in advancing PIF conservation efforts. Laurel has worked tirelessly to build bridges between state, regional, and national bird conservation efforts. She has served as a voice for state-level issues and on-the-ground conservation in groups ranging in scale from Joint Ventures to multi-national committees. Laurel has also been an integral part in bringing together the game and non-game bird conservation community, both in the state-level conservation projects that she oversees and in larger multi-state efforts. She was recognized with this award at both the recent North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Arlington, VA, and the joint SEPIF/SE Quail Study Group meeting held in Columbia, SC. Laurel serves as vice-chair of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture's Nongame Bird Conservation Committee, and serves on the ACJV shorebird committee. Laurel also served as chair of the newly formed Atlantic Flyway Nongame Technical Section in 2007, a parallel structure in the Flyway to address non-game issues.



Paul Schmidt, USFWS Assistant Director, Migratory Birds presents Laurel Moore Barnhill the 2008 National Leadership Award from Partners in Flight. USFWS photo

NABCI Produces Farm Bill Guide

The Farm Bill is one of the most important tools enacted by Congress for restoring, enhancing, and protecting habitat on private lands. As the number of conservation programs has increased since the 1985 Farm Bill, so have the amount of funds authorized to further conservation on private lands. The 2008 farm Bill authorized approximately \$23 billion for a five year period. To help landowners, conservationists, biologists, and others take advantage of conservation programs in the 2008 Farm Bill, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative in partnership with the Intermountain West Joint Venture has published the Field Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill for Fish and Wildlife Conservation. The publication is available in pdf format on the [NABCI Web site](#). This site will also be presenting the material as interactive Web pages that will be updated as information changes.

The publication presents an overview of the Farm Bill and its history, as well as important information on organizations that administer it. Also provided is information on setting priorities, maximizing wildlife benefits, conservation planning, conservation practice standards, performance measurements, and assessments. A resources page provides citations of studies that document the impacts of Farm Bill programs and practices on wildlife. The author, Randall Gray, worked for 31 years for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, where he helped develop, deliver, and evaluate Farm Bill conservation programs. Before retiring, his final position was the National Wildlife Biologist. He is presently the Farm Bill Coordinator for the Intermountain West Joint Venture.