



## **Waterbird Conservation Council**

### **Principles of Membership**

January 2006

#### **Introduction**

The Waterbird Conservation Council (Council) leads the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas initiative, facilitating the conservation of waterbirds throughout the lands and waters of North America and much of the Western Hemisphere. It has primary responsibility for coordinating, supporting, and communicating implementation of the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, and is working towards the development of similar plans and strategies across the range of waterbirds in the Western Hemisphere.

The Initiative focuses in two key areas: 1) meeting the short-term conservation needs of high priority waterbird populations and habitats, and 2) working toward the long-term institutionalization of waterbird conservation within government, the environmental community, and associated partners throughout the Americas.

The Council is comprised of a voluntary board of natural resource policy-makers, land and wildlife managers, industry representatives, environmental educators, scientists and fund-raisers concerned about waterbird resources and their conservation in the New World. The Council is self-appointing and operates through working committees focused on developing technical information for guiding waterbird conservation, multi-scale implementation of conservation plans, promoting range-wide waterbird conservation through international cooperation, communicating conservation needs of waterbirds, addressing the most urgent needs of waterbird conservation, and developing monetary and in-kind resources to achieve waterbird conservation.

The Council's Membership Committee (formerly Nominations Committee) is responsible for ensuring the ongoing vigor of the Council. In consultation with the Executive Committee and the working committees of the Council, the Membership Committee identifies and recruits new members to Council to provide broad and appropriate representation of the many conservation interests (geographical, taxonomic, thematic, conservation activity) of the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas Initiative. In addition, the Membership Committee facilitates active participation of members and promotes the benefits accruing to members from Council membership.

#### **Composition of the Council**

Appropriate composition of the Council is critical to achieving the Initiative's conservation goals. A Council composed of highly dedicated and reputable individuals will, through their personal commitment and stature within conservation and resource management organizations, be able to leverage a great positive impact on the status of waterbirds throughout the plan area. By leading and participating in Council activities and



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institutionalizing waterbird conservation capacity within their organizations, Council members will collectively produce effective conservation results in a timely manner.

A Council with membership from regions with undeveloped infrastructure and personnel resources can facilitate local capacity building for waterbird conservation. Representation of key governments, industries, and other organizations will improve commitment to conservation policies that will better sustain waterbird populations.

Because the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas Initiative is a partnership in its infancy, it is expected that many attributes of Council composition (including Council size, geographical representation, and stature of members within their organizations) will evolve with time. The Membership Committee is responsible for leading the Council in discerning strategic approaches for Council composition and recommends the following principles to guide composition of the Council:

- 1) **National representation**—as an international initiative, WCA is committed to parity in national representation and will seek a minimum of one individual to represent each country throughout the Americas (29 within the plan area; 41 throughout the hemisphere)
- 2) **Organization and expertise balance**—diverse organizations and areas of expertise are all required to achieve the vision of waterbird conservation articulated by WCA. Integration of these capacities within the Council leverages the power of individual organizations and activities. The WCA will seek balance between government and private sector organizations representing waterbird conservation interests on the Council. In addition, balance will be sought in conservation expertise including policy development, wildlife and habitat management, avian research, conservation outreach, and resource acquisition.
- 3) **Building conservation capacity**—in addition to the critical function of guiding WCA, the initiative recognizes the opportunity the Council provides as a venue for networking and problem-solving waterbird issues. Strategic appointments to the Council will help build conservation capacity in regions with undeveloped sources of conservation support. In addition, appointments to Council can be used strategically to address high priority conservation problems.

### Implications for Recruitment and Operation

Principles guiding the recruitment and installation of Council members have important implications for Council operation.

- 1) **National Representation.** Because the original focus of the Council was on North American waterbird conservation, the Council currently has a disproportionate membership from the U.S. (60% as of 2/2006.). A primary objective of the Membership Committee is to identify and recruit appropriate candidates from under-represented regions and sub-continental areas of the Americas. It is likely also that as waterbird conservation capacity continues to grow, some US members will be replaced by members from other countries in the hemisphere.



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- 2) **Council Size.** The WCA is committed to waterbird conservation throughout the Americas. The geographical scope of the initiative anticipates a council of approximately 50. The current size of the Council is 28. Although the Membership Committee is cognizant of the potential challenges of administering an enlarged council, it was determined that the benefits of developing a representative council outweighed the effort required to optimize efficient and productive operation. The Council works primarily in committee (6 topical committees; average 8-10 per committee) and meets together only annually (where a significant portion of our annual meeting is dedicated to committee work). As the size of the Council grows, it is anticipated that the Executive Committee will increase its responsibility for Council direction.
- 3) **Organizational vs. personal membership.** The WCA recognizes the commitment and achievements in waterbird conservation of individuals and organizations throughout the Americas. The WCA will seek representation from key organizations with wildlife and resource management mandates to secure needed support and endorsement of council activities, increasing the profile of the Council and its effectiveness in achieving its goals. Personal commitment of the representatives of those organizations is also needed to ensure that Council members share the workload and benefit from the professional association with their fellow members. The personal commitment to waterbird conservation of members not affiliated with these key organizations is also a source of strength, so the Council will be open to extraordinary, non-affiliated conservationists. Because personal commitment is highly desirable in council members, the Council discourages alternates for members at annual meetings.
- 4) **“Hands On” vs. “Policy” Council.** Because the Initiative is largely unfunded and waterbird conservation has yet to be institutionalized throughout the plan area, membership of the Council in early years will be characterized by individuals able to commit significant time and energy to rolling out the start-up objectives of the Council as outlined in annual committee work plans. As commitment to waterbird conservation develops within agencies and organizations, the council will likely evolve from a “hands-on” board to a “policy” board.

### **Recruitment and Installation of New Members**

Recruitment and installation of new members must be accomplished in a thoughtful way that clearly communicates the expectations of the Council, both in terms of benefits to waterbird conservation and to individual members. The Council has developed Terms of Reference for council members, and the Membership Committee has committed to providing more detailed documentation of expectations for members, especially committee chairs. Committee chairs have an effective means of engaging and assessing potential candidates by seeking their involvement in the committee work of the Council. The Membership Committee solicits candidates from the Council and others to meet identified targets for Council composition. Concise biographical information is developed for each candidate, which is shared with the Executive Committee. The Membership Committee seeks approval first from the Executive Committee to place candidates' names before the Council. Securing this, the Membership Committee provides biographical information to the Council and seeks consensus on issuing invitations to candidates. Council members



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are subject to renewable three-year terms; membership on the Executive Committee of the Council is subject to two-year renewable terms. Councilor terms will be staggered to ensure continuity of participation. The Membership Committee will provide a recommendation to the Executive Committee and Council on issuing an invitation to reappointment for sitting council members whose term is expiring.

### **Participation on the Waterbird Conservation Council**

Engaged participation by Council members is a critical element of waterbird conservation as envisioned by the Initiative. Council members are expected to serve as active participants and leaders on Council committees and within regional working groups that are implementing waterbird conservation at local scales. Members are recruited to serve on the Council because of the strengths they bring as individuals. Although meetings of the Council committees and the Council as a whole are open, Council members are discouraged from having alternates within organizations and agencies attend on their behalf. The Executive Committee of the Council bears the important responsibility of ensuring that the working committees of the Council remain active and responsive to the interests and engagement of Council members. The Membership Committee is expected to assist the Executive Committee in identifying successful strategies for Council operation.