



Central Hardwoods Joint Venture Strategic Plan, 2020-2025



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Approved by the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture Management Board, 18 November 2020, consisting of the following members:

Mark Gudlin, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (CHJV Board Chair)
Mark Hutchings, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (CHJV Board Vice- Chair)
Derek Alkire, National Wild Turkey Federation
Tim Caughran, Quail Forever
Michael Chaveas, U. S. D. A. Forest Service
Dean Demarest, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Allisyn Gillet, Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Jef Hodges, National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
Joel Porath, Missouri Department of Conservation
Allen Purcell, The Nature Conservancy, Indiana Chapter
Kate Slankard, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
David Wiedenfeld, American Bird Conservancy
Chris Wolkonowski, Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Northern Bobwhite: Dan Reinking
Restored open woodland: Paul Nelson
Glade: Missouri Department of Conservation
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Mission of the CHJV: The partnership embraces the goal of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative “to deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships.” To that end, the partners of the Joint Venture seek to base conservation delivery upon sound science and principles of adaptive management, and to target conservation actions toward landscapes with the greatest ecological and socioeconomic potential to support viable populations of priority birds in four general habitat types: grasslands; grass-shrublands; forest-woodlands; and wetlands.

Introduction

In 2000, members of the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture (CHJV) formed a partnership with the primary purpose of elevating emphasis on all-bird conservation within the Central Hardwoods Bird Conservation Region (CHBCR). The CHJV partnership sought to take a lead role in implementing “all-bird” conservation objectives as set forth by the various national and international bird conservation initiatives operating within the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI).

The Central Hardwoods Joint Venture partnership was built around the concept that meaningful and effective bird conservation must take place at the landscape scale and with a sound, scientifically based, biological foundation. To achieve its goals, the partnership brought together the jurisdictional commitment and collective energies, talents and expertise of state and federal land-managing agencies and conservation organizations operating within the CHJV boundaries. The coordination provided through the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture partnership has enabled the partners to achieve the delivery of conservation in a synergistic and effective manner. The benefits of this partnership include:

- 1) shared purpose;
- 2) increased resources;
- 3) shared efficiency;
- 4) innovative solutions;
- 5) better communication;
- 6) increased public support, and;
- 7) increased organizational morale and image.

This document is intended to reprise the Joint Venture’s long-term vision for all bird conservation within the Central Hardwoods Bird Conservation Region (Figure 1), following 20 years of activity, and sets forth objectives for the next 3 to 5 years. The partnership continues to base conservation delivery upon sound science and principles of adaptive management, and to target conservation actions toward landscapes with the greatest ecological and socioeconomic potential to support viable populations of priority birds in three general habitat types: grasslands; forests and woodlands; and wetland systems needed to support waterfowl at desired levels

The partnership has greatly strengthened the biological foundation upon which planning and evaluation are based (see www.chjv.org), and continues to believe that communication between the Management Board, the bird initiatives, and within the conservation community at large is vital to the success of bird

conservation in the Central Hardwoods Bird Conservation Region. In addition, the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture partnership recognizes the need to work with other conservation partnerships both within the United States and the international arena to insure that the conservation needs of the Central Hardwoods' priority migratory bird species are met within all the geographic areas utilized throughout their annual cycle.

Figure 1.



As of 2020, the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture is guided by a Management Board with representatives from the following agencies and organizations:

- American Bird Conservancy
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (position vacant)
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
- Missouri Department of Conservation
- National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Quail Forever
- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
- The Nature Conservancy, Indiana Chapter
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U. S. D. A. Forest Service

New partners may be added in the future at the invitation of the Management Board.

The Biological Foundation

Conservation efforts in the Central Hardwoods have focused on preserving the ecological integrity of the region's relatively unfragmented landscapes, as well as restoring and managing habitat in areas where fragmentation, conversion, and loss of habitat have already occurred. Bird conservation goals and objectives developed for the Bird Conservation Region are based upon a sound biological foundation. This biological foundation has two basic components: prioritizing species on the basis of their ecological vulnerability and conservation need and determining relationships between the abundance and viability of birds and habitat conditions at a variety of spatial scales. These relationships are used to guide conservation design and delivery and to assess the kinds and amount of habitat needed to reach regional and continental bird population goals. We've sought to determine how bird populations respond to changes in habitat conditions we've brought about, but this work is ongoing and can be improved with new approaches to monitoring and spatial modeling techniques. Thus, an iterative process of conservation planning and conservation delivery should continue to be followed by evaluation of bird population responses to our conservation efforts.

Prioritization:

Priority species and their conservation needs for the Central Hardwoods BCR have been identified by Partners in Flight (<https://partnersinflight.org/>); the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (<https://nawmp.org/timeline/2018-update>), and the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (<https://bringbackbobwhites.org/>). Shorebird and waterbird species will be added if the bird initiatives that oversee those taxa assign priorities to the CHBCR. A list of priority species and their general habitat affiliations are presented on our website (see <https://www.chjv.org/priority-birds-habitats/overview>)

With regards to the desire to continue to improve the biological foundation upon which the CHJV's conservation planning and delivery are based, we reiterate our **goal to strengthen the biological foundation** upon which planning, evaluation, and conservation delivery are based via the following:

Objective 1. Continue to develop, seek funding for, and implement, in conjunction with the Oaks and Prairies, Lower Mississippi Valley and East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Ventures, a "full annual cycle" research project to identify what and how habitat and other limiting factors affect the population trajectories of Northern Bobwhite, Henslow's Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark in separate parts of the annual cycle to better guide conservation efforts going forward.

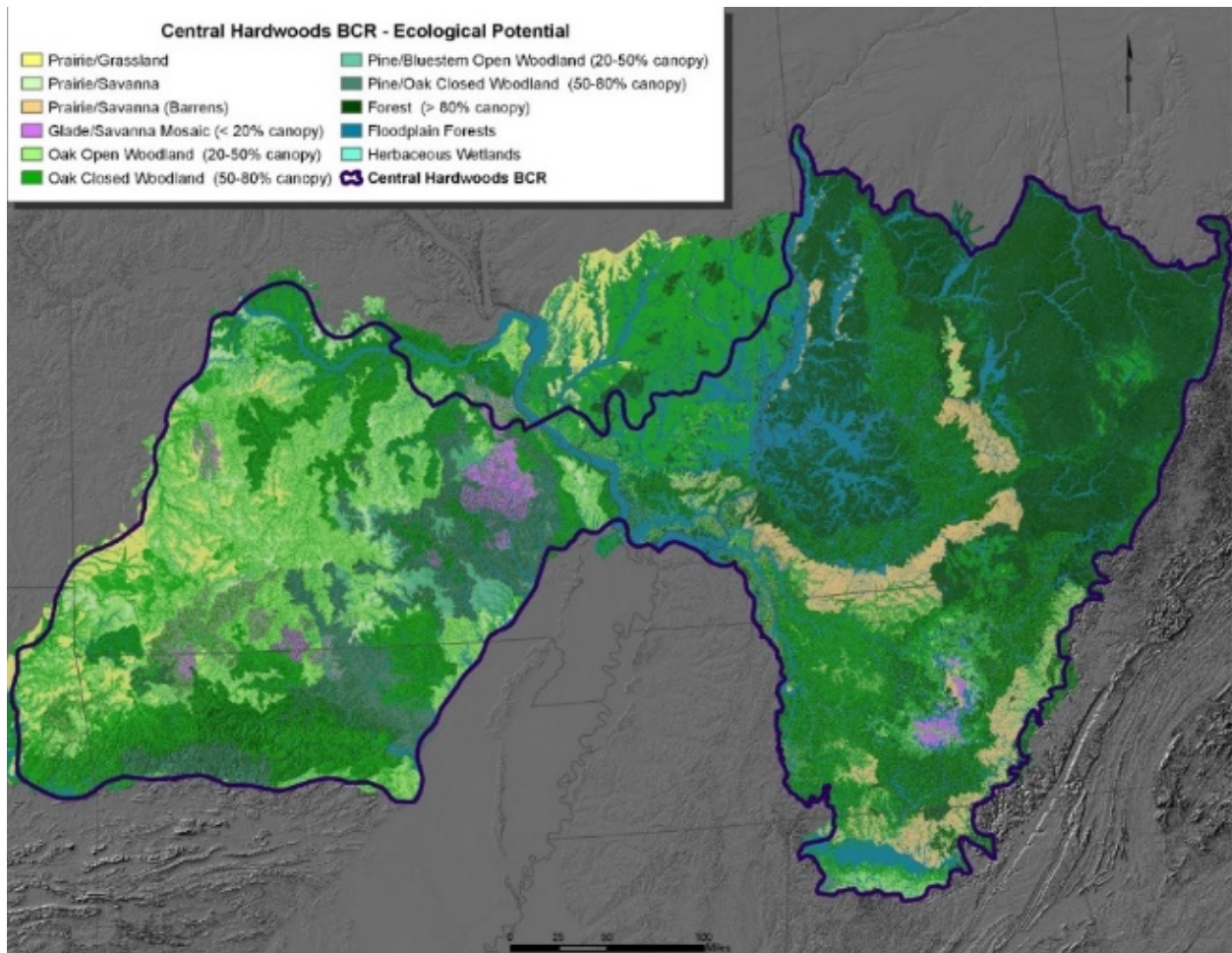
Objective 2. Improve and adjust population and habitat objectives for forest and woodland-breeding landbirds and migrant and wintering waterfowl as needed.

Objective 3. Review, recommend and foster research as needed to further refine and improve the biological foundation for the Central Hardwoods BCR.

Conservation Design:

Conservation Design includes the creation of decision support tools to assist land managers in selecting appropriate conservation actions on the lands they manage, designation of priority areas for conservation actions, and determination of the quantity and spatial orientation of habitat needed to achieve bird population objectives. The CHJV, has modeled and mapped the general habitat types that characterized the CHBCR prior to widespread European settlement to guide decisions about where to restore specific natural community types such as prairies, grasslands, woodlands, forests, floodplain forests, etc. (see <https://www.chjv.org/geography/mapping-habitat-for-restoration>, and Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Map of historic distribution of eleven natural community types across the Central Hardwoods priori to widespread European settlement.



This map can then be overlain with maps of remotely-sensed current vegetation, such as National Landcover data to determine whether and where a habitat type has been converted to another landcover/landuse and thus, the difficulty in restoring that habitat type in that place. Population and habitat objectives for species in the grass-shrub and forest and woodlands suites are based on the ability for these habitats to be restored in some combination in each state/BCR segment of the Joint Venture (<https://www.chjv.org/science-evaluation/hsi-models>).

Waterfowl population objectives were provided to the CHJV by a science team associated with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, and, using their suggested methodology, matched to habitat conditions using a geographic-information-systems model (see <https://www.chjv.org/science-evaluation/gis-models>). The results indicated that conditions needed to sustain waterfowl at prescribed levels were adequate in the BCR.

While opportunity exists for significant acreages of those forest and woodland communities to be restored at landscape-scales, very little native prairie exists in the CHBCR. Therefore, conservation design for grassland birds might best be determined by modeling where species are still relatively

abundant and most viable (see: <https://www.chjv.org/science-evaluation/statistical-models>). This was done in recent years, but issues with the abundance estimates led to the need to correct errors in the way the data were developed, and we now have the opportunity to model distribution and abundance of some species of grassland birds across both the Oaks and Prairies and Central Hardwoods from very similar data sets. As a result, **new objectives for conservation design** in the CHBCR are as follows:

Objective 1: Develop spatially-explicit population and habitat objectives for at least three species of Partners in Flight grassland priority species for the Central Hardwoods Bird Conservation region, Northern Bobwhite, Henslow's Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark, and Northern Bobwhite, Dickcissel and Eastern Meadowlark across both the CHBCR and Oaks and Prairies.

Objective 2. Work with researchers at the University of Missouri to compare maps of distribution and abundance of at least three species to those provided by eBird and the Breeding Bird Survey to assess whether the latter could be just as effective at guiding conservation design and those derived from point count data whose collection was in part financed by CHJV partners.

Conservation Delivery:

The Central Hardwoods Joint Venture partnership seeks to foster and facilitate the effective delivery of bird conservation objectives across the Central Hardwoods Bird Conservation Region by bringing the programmatic capabilities of all partners to bear in a coordinated fashion to affect landscape change. Objectives related to the **goal of achieving effective and efficient delivery of conservation outcomes for priority bird species** in the CHBCR include:

Objective 1: Facilitate and enhance the ability of the CHJV partners to develop and implement projects that fulfill the JV's mission of achieving integrated bird conservation across the landscape, incorporating bird conservation objectives in land and habitat managing activities.

Objective 2. Continue to develop strategies to weave integrated bird conservation objectives into private lands programs within the Central Hardwoods BCR.

Objective 3. Develop the technical capabilities to track progress of delivering habitat objectives at multiple scales.

Objective 4. Identify and pursue sources of funding for implementing bird conservation objectives through a variety of mechanisms.

Central Hardwoods Joint Venture Administrative Structure

Management Board:

The Management Board currently consists of representatives of state and federal agencies with jurisdictional responsibilities within the Central Hardwoods BCR, as well as representatives of other partners. The Board can add representatives of other agencies and organizations at its discretion. The Board provides guidance and support to the Joint Venture Coordinator on the overall direction and

management of the JV, approves budgets and funding needs, and serve as liaisons for the JV to other entities, both public and private. Member agencies and organizations on the Management Board are expected to commit energy and resources to developing a shared vision of bird conservation for the CHJV and coordinating their otherwise independent actions in the cooperative pursuit and refinement of that vision.

JV Coordinator and Staff:

The CHJV will employ a Coordinator to see that the goals and objectives of the JV plan are met to be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the CHJV and supervise other staff and coordinate with any outside teams or team members. The CHJV currently employs a Coordinator, Science Coordinator and Delivery Coordinator, and would benefit by adding another delivery coordinator should resources become available.

Science and Technical Teams:

Science and other technical teams will work on an ad hoc and voluntary basis, and be comprised of staff of JV partner agencies and organizations and/or other qualified and interested parties. The teams will address issues associated with the biological foundation and conservation design, including developing population goals and habitat objectives, identifying research and monitoring needs, and discuss, develop, and implement conservation delivery strategies and cooperative projects. The science and technical teams will be coordinated by any staff person as needed.

Additional staff may be hired to coordinate science, delivery and other technical teams, work with local and regional partnerships, continue to build the JV's GIS and information management infrastructures, and promote habitat management, land protection and policies and programs beneficial for birds of conservation concern in the CHBCR.

Communications, Education and Outreach:

Communications, education and outreach strategies will be developed by committees consisting of staff of JV partner agencies and organizations, in conjunction with outside consultants when needed.