SOUTHERN WINGS PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE

A Partnership of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies

2025 REPORT

Southern Wings, created in 2009 and coordinated by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, connects state agencies with partners working towards habitat conservation, management, and research on priority migratory birds that spend up to eight months of the year outside of the United States.

SOUTHERN Wings

ASSOCIATION of FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

For over fifteen years, Southern Wings has united state fish and wildlife agencies with outstanding partner organizations advancing conservation efforts benefiting migratory birds throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. As we embrace an ever-increasing suite of tools and technologies tracking the movements and migrations of our wildlife, we have come to understand to an unprecedented degree the living links that connect not only our geographies, but our actions and impacts as well. We know, for example, that while about one in ten Canada Warbler breed in my home state of Maine, almost half spend the northern winter in the Colombian Andes. As shared stewards of these species, our agencies have the incredible opportunity to complement the conservation actions taking place within our states by helping to ensure they have habitat on the non-breeding grounds as well. We recognize that migratory birds are a domestic resource, whether they are actively within our borders or not, and that single-season conservation is neither efficient nor sufficient.

I convened this Task Force with the intention of growing Southern Wings through the enhanced voluntary participation of state fish and wildlife agencies. I charged the members of this group to think creatively, examine critically, and recommend strategic opportunities to further state-led conservation of migratory birds throughout the full annual cycle. I am proud to share the results of this Presidential Task Force with the members of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and our partners.

As we continue to confront the ongoing declines of North America's migratory birds, it will be efforts like Southern Wings that will help lead us along the path of recovery. The warblers, thrushes, orioles, shorebirds, and more that weave together our world along their hemispheric journeys both inspire and instruct how we can work together for their benefit. The $279 billion birding economy depends on healthy, robust populations of migratory birds, and walking through the Maine woods, admiring the colors and songs of our breeding species, it is no wonder that over 1 in 3 American adults harbor a fascination with them. State fish and wildlife agencies, working closely with trusted partners, must continue to support and expand this important initiative.

Judith Camuso
Commissioner of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
President of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

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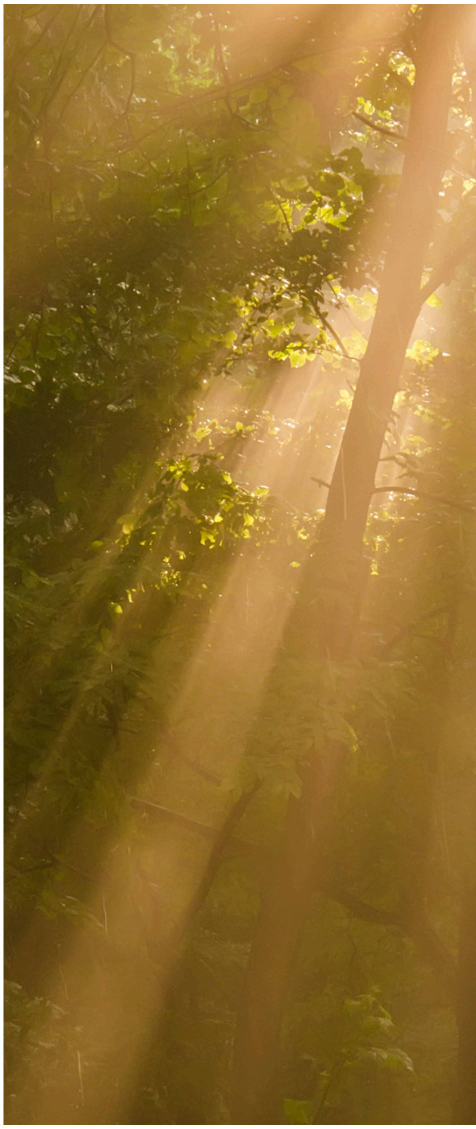


No one state can conserve migratory birds—but together, we can. Southern Wings delivers the coordinated conservation approach we need and turns our commitment into action.

~ Kendra Wecker, Chief of the Division of Wildlife, Ohio Department of Natural Resources

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

CHAIR: Kendra Wecker, Ohio Division of Wildlife

Josh Avey, *Arizona Game and Fish Department*
Bernadette Graham Hudson, *Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife*
Becky Gwynn, *Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources*
Marshall Johnson, *National Audubon Society*
Chris Kennedy, *Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks*
Jay Osenkowski, *Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management*
Mike Parr, *American Bird Conservancy*
Sara Schweitzer, *North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission*
Jason Sumners, *Missouri Department of Conservation*
Tammy VerCauteren, *Bird Conservancy of the Rockies*
Karen Waldrop, *Ducks Unlimited*

STAFF SUPPORT:
Deb Hahn and Bradley Wilkinson, AFWA

ADVISORY BODY:
Southern Wings Technical Committee

ACRONYM LIST
AFWA, *Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies*
BCC, *Bird Conservation Committee*
NEAFWA, *Northeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies*
NMBCA, *Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act*
NGO, *Non-Governmental Organization*
PIF, *Partners in Flight*
ROI, *Return on Investment*
SGCN, *Species of Greatest Conservation Need*
SWAP, *State Wildlife Action Plan*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North American bird populations are in significant decline, with the 2025 State of the Birds Report confirming ongoing losses across all major habitats. These declines are most severe among migratory species—many of which are jointly stewarded by U.S. state fish and wildlife agencies and dependent on habitats in Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean during the non-breeding season.

Effective conservation cannot stop at state or national borders. Like waterfowl conservation, the recovery of migratory birds depends on international, state-supported collaboration. That's where Southern Wings plays a critical role.

Established by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) in 2009, Southern Wings enables state fish and wildlife agencies to participate in international conservation projects targeting the full annual cycle of migratory birds.

Program Achievements to Date:

- Over $4.2 million in state contributions matched with $9 million in partner funds
- Over 1.5 million acres of habitat conserved
- 800,000 trees planted
- Direct benefits to 81 shared priority species

This high-impact, low-overhead model offers a flexible, science-driven way for states to extend their conservation legacy across borders while reinforcing in-state investments in bird and habitat conservation. Recognizing the challenges faced by state fish and wildlife agencies, the Task Force identified key recommendations to chart the path forward.

> ABC is extremely grateful to Southern Wings and its participating states. It is vital that we extend protection to American migratory birds when they leave our shores and cross borders to reach their wintering grounds. North American bird declines are real and our world would be greatly diminished without these species that bring joy to millions, and serve so many critical ecological functions. Expanding Southern Wings is a vital part of turning these declines around.
>
> ~ *Mike Parr, American Bird Conservancy*

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Set State-Specific Investment Goals

- Adopt a transparent, fair funding formula that encourages states to meet identified benchmarks and achieve programmatic goals in contributions.
  - Based on each state's migratory bird conservation priorities and number of recreational birdwatchers (a key user group).
  - Emphasizes biological relevance, ensuring funds are tied to Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).
- Introduce a tiered recognition program to acknowledge leadership and commitment to full annual cycle conservation.

2 Strengthen Governance

- Establish a dedicated AFWA Southern Wings Advisory Committee for strategic oversight.
- Plan for a part-time coordinator position when contributions reach key thresholds.
- Explore streamlined mechanisms to improve fund disbursement and partner coordination—without sacrificing state agency flexibility.

3 Expand Participation and Impact

- Implement a national marketing and communications strategy focused on conservation Return on Investment (ROI) and state-specific benefits.
- Launch a coordinated Spring 2026 outreach campaign tied to migration season.
- Identify and pursue alternative funding sources, including Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) partnerships and new federal or philanthropic streams.
- Clarify the allowable use of Pittman-Robertson funds for international conservation and ensure eligibility under the Collaborative Conservation Initiative.

Southern Wings not only supports biodiversity and State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) implementation—it protects a major economic driver in states, from tourism to recreation.

Migratory birds generate significant economic returns:

- 96 million Americans participated in birdwatching in 2022
- Birdwatching contributed $279 billion in total economic output
- Supported 1.4 million jobs

Southern Wings is a proven, cost-effective vehicle for advancing the state's conservation leadership on a hemispheric scale and achieving state level conservation objectives. The Task Force's recommendation provides actionable, scalable steps for states to strengthen their role in reversing migratory bird declines—while supporting economic development, outdoor recreation, and ecological resilience.

By investing now, state leaders can ensure that their in-state efforts are complemented by action elsewhere, and that migratory birds—and the millions who enjoy and depend on them—have a sustainable future.

OUR SHARED CHALLENGE AND PURPOSE

Neotropical migratory birds face unprecedented threats. According to the 2025 State of the Birds Report, ongoing population declines over the past 50 years have affected nearly all of America’s birds. These analyses and others show that population losses are happening across habitats including grasslands, aridlands, and forests, but are particularly acute for migratory species regardless of the habitat they depend upon.

Most of America’s birds are migratory and travel hundreds or even thousands of miles between breeding and non-breeding areas, relying on diverse habitats throughout their journey. Recovering these birds cannot be achieved within a single state, country, or even continent. Their conservation demands coordinated, collaborative action across their entire annual cycle and geographic range.

Southern Wings embodies this approach, patterned after the same successful model applied in waterfowl recovery. The Southern Wings program empowers state agencies to lead and participate in a collective, coordinated response that spans borders and continents in regions critical to the survival of more than half of America's birds.

Since its inception, Southern Wings has invested over $4.2 million in conservation action at high-priority non-breeding sites. These efforts have been matched by $9 million in partner contributions, leading to the protection of over 1.5 million acres of vital migratory bird habitat, the planting of more than 800,000 trees, and direct benefits to 81 priority bird species shared across the hemisphere.

Owing to the comparatively smaller geographies of Latin America and the Caribbean compared to breeding areas in Canada and the United States, migratory birds tend to be more concentrated in space during their non-breeding season. This spatial concentration means that threats in these regions can have disproportionate impacts on entire populations. At the same time, it offers an opportunity: strategic conservation action at key sites can deliver high-impact, cost-effective results.

Conserving and managing sites and engaging people across the full annual cycle is essential to ensuring the success of in-state conservation efforts. Without action across the full annual cycle, investments made in breeding habitat and domestic conservation programs risk being undermined.

And the benefits of migratory bird conservation extend beyond ecology. In 2022 alone, 96 million Americans participated in birdwatching, spending $107.6 billion and supporting 1.4 million jobs. The total economic output from birdwatching activities reached $279 billion. Birds are a de facto domestic resource wherever they occur—whether in North American backyards or South American rainforests.

Southern Wings was born out of a clear need and the recognition that full annual cycle conservation is essential for reversing declines in migratory bird populations. The program builds on the legacy of successful initiatives like Fall Flights and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan—models rooted in international collaboration and state leadership.

Southern Wings provides a practical, flexible pathway for state fish and wildlife agencies to extend their conservation impact beyond their own borders. By conserving and managing across all the habitats migratory birds need, the program helps secure the long-term future of migratory birds and ensures the effectiveness and integrity of in-state conservation investments.

As Southern Wings continues to grow, it stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, science-driven action, and a shared commitment to conserving migratory birds throughout their full annual cycle.

HISTORY OF SOUTHERN WINGS

The idea for Southern Wings emerged from a September 2005 presentation by the Missouri Department of Conservation at the Partners in Flight (PIF) Implementation Committee meeting. The presentation emphasized the need for a mechanism that would enable U.S. state fish and wildlife agencies to partner in full annual cycle bird conservation across all the regions crucial to migratory birds.

Recognizing this gap, the AFWA established the Southern Wings Task Force in 2007 with a specific charge:

> ***To create a funding mechanism that provides an easy and flexible avenue for states willing to participate in conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean by contributing funds annually through a U.S.-based third party that will handle the funds and coordinate the distribution of funds.***

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

In March 2008, the Southern Wings Task Force presented an interim report with recommendations to AFWA's PIF/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group and Bird Conservation Committee (BCC). The report provided preliminary guidance, identified opportunities and challenges, proposed four alternatives for implementation, and recommended next steps.

<u>The guidance emphasized that the mechanism should</u>:

1. Be grounded in the biological connections between migratory birds in U.S. states that spend part of their annual cycle in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.
2. Enable easy and seamless financial participation by interested states.
3. Provide transparent reporting on progress and accomplishments.
4. Maximize the match and leverage state funds.

STATE ENGAGEMENT AND LAUNCH

During program development, the BCC Chair surveyed states about their interest in participating. Of 21 responses, 18 states expressed willingness to participate, though six cited current funding limitations. The responses showed most states were comfortable pooling funds for regional projects, required reporting on project outcomes, and preferred overhead charges below 20%. Regional associations—Western, Southeastern, and Midwest—offered to administer funds for member states.

Drawing inspiration from early international waterfowl conservation initiatives in Canada—which began with just three participating states—the Task Force formally recommended launching Southern Wings. In 2009, AFWA officially endorsed the program, which began accepting voluntary state contributions that same year. Throughout development, state, federal, and non-governmental partners played a critical role in shaping the program and facilitating its launch.

GROWTH AND IMPACT

In its first year (2009–2010), seven states contributed more than $75,000. In the second year (2010–2011), 10 states plus the 13-state Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) contributed $128,500, raising an additional $48,400 from partners. Since then, annual state contributions have ranged from $130,000 to $350,000 with over $4.2 million in contributions in the first 15 years. More details are available in the 15-year Anniversary Impact Report and Infographic.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND ADAPTATION

Evaluation, monitoring, and sustained commitment have been integral to Southern Wings' evolution. Project reporting tracks objectives and measures key metrics such as funds leveraged, trees planted, and people engaged, and provides opportunities for dialogue among partners about project improvement. In 2010, states developed a 10-year Vision (Appendix I) to grow the program; in 2012, AFWA passed a resolution reaffirming commitment to Southern Wings and its expansion (Appendix II). Surveys in 2019 and 2020 gathered input on supporting SWAP updates and increasing participation. Responses led to strategic actions such as launching a webinar series; delivering presentations to commissions, states agency staff, joint ventures, and flyway councils; creating template language for incorporating full annual cycle conservation into SWAP updates; disseminating project success stories; and creating a full annual cycle online guide.

In 2024, the Association once again passed a resolution to reaffirm and strengthen support for Southern Wings (Appendix III).

Vision: Healthy and sustainable populations of migratory birds throughout the Western Hemisphere that are enjoyed for generations to come.

Mission: Encourage and facilitate state fish and wildlife agency participation in conservation projects for shared priority birds in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

SOUTHERN WINGS PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE

With continuous improvement and adaptation in mind, President Judy Camuso established the Southern Wings Presidential Task Force (Task Force) to strategically grow state-led investments in full annual cycle conservation by increasing voluntary participation in Southern Wings. The Task Force, composed of leaders from state fish and wildlife agencies and partner organizations involved in migratory bird conservation, was charged with examining and recommending actions in three priority areas:

1. The feasibility, value, and implications of developing a funding formula to identify state-specific contribution goals.
2. Opportunities to improve the program’s efficiency and effectiveness through critical evaluation of its current governance model.
3. Specific, targeted actions to raise awareness of Southern Wings among state fish and wildlife agency personnel, grow the program financially, and ultimately increase the impact of the program.

The following sections detail the Task Force’s recommendations related to each priority area. The Task Force recognizes the numerous challenges faced by state fish and wildlife agencies—and acknowledges that they are adapting to a changing landscape. However, it stresses that we must plan for the future now by establishing a clear, forward-looking conservation vision that Southern Wings and its partners can collectively champion.

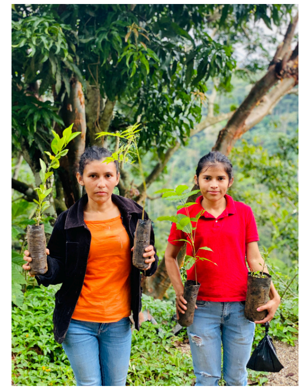
El Tokio: Nestor Ascención, Pronatura's field tech, next to a new signed installed in their grasslands reserve

El Tokio: Mr. Tomás Bustos, reserves manager, next to a new fence installed to enhance rotational cattle grazing in Pronatura's grassland reserve

STATE CONTRIBUTION GOALS OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Overview

Southern Wings engages state fish and wildlife agencies in full annual cycle conservation efforts by matching voluntary financial contributions from states with trusted, on-the-ground partners implementing conservation projects in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean which support priority migratory species. While the mechanisms facilitating these connections are designed to be flexible, transparent, and efficient, state fish and wildlife agencies are not obligated to participate in Southern Wings or any of its projects. Further, state agencies may be uncertain about their ability to contribute, the scale of their contributions relative to impact, or if contributions are comparable to other, similar, state agencies.



Nicaragua: Beneficiaries receiving cardamom plants and shade trees to enhance farmland and restore degraded lands.

In 2010, Southern Wings set an overall programmatic goal of facilitating $2 million annually in state contributions to conservation partners as part of the 10-Year Vision document. While the Vision document anticipated a gradual, sustained increase in funding over those ten years via the achievement of total state agency participation, it did not identify proportional (i.e., state-specific) financial targets for reaching that overall goal. This made tracking and evaluating strategies for goal attainment difficult to measure. It also failed to describe the relative responsibility of each state for achieving the national goal of the program; given the strong support of Southern Wings shown by AFWA as a collective, contributing to Southern Wings should be a considered action for each state and therefore a shared responsibility.

Colombia: Native trees being transported to restoration sites

In contrast, the Fall Flights program has implemented state-specific contribution targets for supporting international waterfowl conservation projects since the creation of the program in 1991. Given the success of Fall Flights in sustainably achieving financial growth through increasing state contributions, Task Force members were charged with examining the feasibility, value, and implications of developing a funding formula to identify state-specific contribution goals for Neotropical migratory bird conservation projects in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

Recommendations

The Task Force reviewed a variety of conservation programs to examine successful applications of funding formulas. Based on models from Fall Flights, which incorporates measures of waterfowl harvest and active waterfowl hunters, and the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program, which is based upon state-level population and land area, it was recommended that a potential funding formula contains two components; one biological and one based on ‘users’ (i.e., likely human beneficiaries).

It was recommended by the Task Force that a biological component to the formula be both connected to state-specific priorities and reflective of potential ecological differences between states and regions. The biological component should also be relatively simple to understand, clearly defensible, and attractive to state fish and wildlife agency leadership. As a basis for satisfying these requirements, state-specific SGCN lists, as derived from SWAP documents, were identified as the foundation for creating a biological component to a funding formula model.

First, the total number of avian SGCN were selected for each state using the 2015 SWAP database hosted by the U.S. Geological Survey. From this list, the number of avian SGCN classified as migratory was identified using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) species list developed to administer the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA). This list was used as a classifier as it was assumed that species identified as beneficiaries of NMBCA projects were also likely to be beneficiaries of Southern Wings funding given their overlap in both objectives and geographic scope. The number of migratory avian SGCN relative to the total number of avian SGCN is provided as a percentage of SGCN deemed migratory, and therefore likely to be positively impacted by Southern Wings, for each state. This percentage was selected as the biological component in contrast to the raw value of migratory SGCN per state, as the methodology in selecting SGCN varied widely among states in 2015, and a percentage was deemed more balanced and able to account for these acknowledged variations in selection criteria.

Defining a ‘user’ component to the model formula was more challenging. Unlike more traditional user groups, such as waterfowl hunters, most species benefited by Southern Wings projects are enjoyed passively. Indeed, it could be argued that the public at large is the user base for healthy and abundant populations of North American birds, regardless of if each person self-identifies as such. Ultimately, it was suggested that the most appropriate base of users would be recreational birdwatchers.

A multi-step estimation process was used to approximate the relative number of birdwatchers per state to be used in the model formula. The 2022 USFWS addendum 'Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis' to the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation reported a total of 96 million American adults self-identified as having actively participated in birdwatching activities. The addendum further provided estimates that partitioned the total number of American birdwatchers into nine regions (reported as a percentage of the total). Using 2020 U.S. Census data, the proportion of a given region's total population represented within each state was calculated; that proportion was then multiplied by the number of birders in the region, as identified in the addendum, to estimate how many regional birders reside in each state, much like a correction factor. For example, Ohio is within the 'East North Central' region, which is reported to contain 14.4 million birdwatchers; Ohio also contains 24.9% of the total (i.e., all people) regional population. Therefore, it was estimated that Ohio has 3.6 million birdwatchers (i.e., 24.9% of 14.4 million). This estimation process was applied to each state except Hawaii.

Nicaragua: farmers planting shade tree

Following the identification of both a biological and user-based component, using the steps detailed above, the Task Force considered a variety of weighting options when determining an ultimate apportionment of the overall programmatic funding goal among states. Three options were presented: an even (i.e., equal) weight between components, a two-thirds weighting scheme favoring the biological component, and a two-thirds weighting scheme favoring the user component. Ultimately, the Task Force recommended a two-thirds weighting scheme favoring the biological component, as this weighting places a greater emphasis on SGCN selection, and therefore underscores the connections between contributing to Southern Wings and direct impacts to priority migratory species for state fish and wildlife agencies.

This formula was used to apportion the overall $2 million programmatic goal among 49 states (Hawaii was excluded on the grounds that they would receive only marginal benefits from contributing to the program). Suggested contribution goals were rounded to the nearest thousand dollars for simplicity and clarity and state-specific benchmarks of 25% and 50% were included as well (Appendix VI).

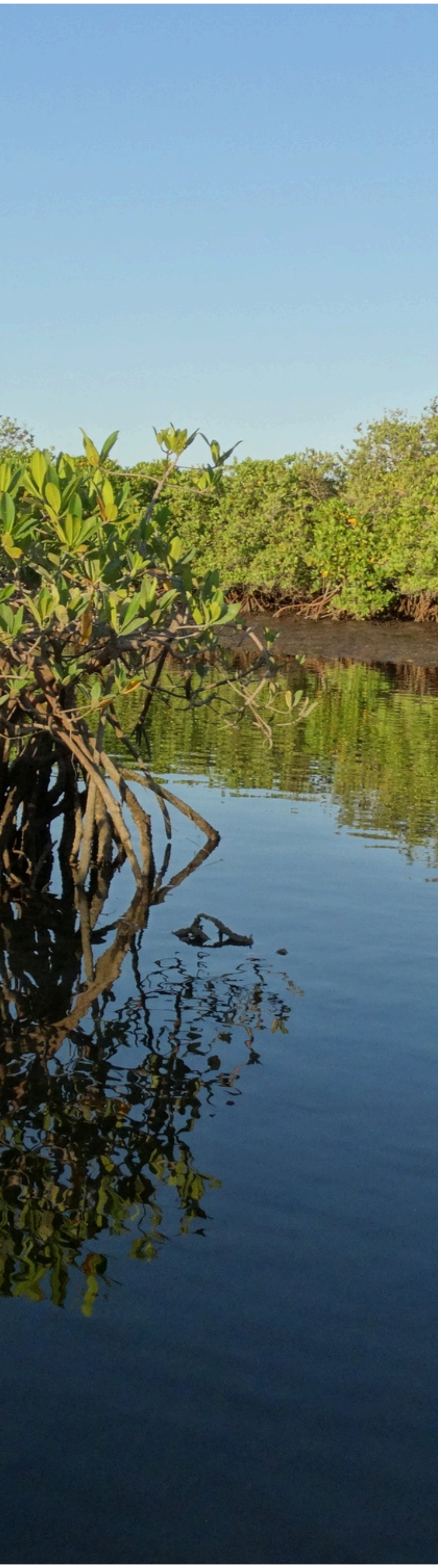
> Because migratory birds are a shared resource, investing in Southern Wings is investing in our collective future. What we do now will echo across flyways for generations.
>
> *~ Ryan Brown, Executive Director. Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources*

Finally, the Task Force recommended the future Southern Wings Committee challenge state fish and wildlife agencies to increase their contributions to 25% of their state-specific contribution goal by 2030. (Appendix V).

The Task Force concurrently discussed the adoption of a recognition program (Appendix V) with the purpose of creating additional value for state fish and wildlife agencies to participate in Southern Wings. The Task Force envisioned a program based upon tiered, or hierarchical, achievements in both state-specific goal attainment and longevity. For example, state fish and wildlife agencies could be categorized into tiers based upon goal attainment: less than 25% attainment, between 25% and 50% attainment, over 51% attainment or higher, and non-participating states. Awards or special recognition could be given to those states reaching a higher tier in contributions. States already occupying the highest tier at the outset of such a program would also be eligible for special recognition. A separate, but complementary, status could also be awarded to those states contributing over a sustained period. For example, states maintaining level contributions over five or ten years would be eligible for special recognition. These two approaches could also be multiplied together if desired; the highest level of award would be given to those states contributing in the top tier for the longest amount of time, while states newly achieving the lowest goal attainment would be given a different status, etc. The Task Force also recognized that, programmatically, the most immediate growth potential for the program lays in the participation of the entirety of state fish and wildlife agencies nationally, even if the initial participation of each state is beneath specific goal targets.

The Task Force considered two key challenges associated with a recognition program. The first challenge is that state agency funding environments are not homogeneous among all members. Some states, for example, have additional excise tax revenues which are not available to other states. This may give those states with additional sources of revenue an enhanced ability to participate in Southern Wings. Comparing absolute value in contributions or goal attainment may therefore not be the best method of properly recognizing state participation given the added challenges faced by states with less diversified revenue sources. A better method may be to scale contributions based on state ability (i.e., revenue or income environment), although the Task Force did not discuss details about such an option.

Secondly, the Task Force acknowledges that not all states who participate in Southern Wings may desire public recognition for a variety of reasons. Coordination with individual states before offering recognition, awards, publicity, etc.



IN SUMMARY, THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS:

- The adoption of the formula to identify state-specific investment goals to Southern Wings
  - The formula has both biological and human-user components
    - The biological component is based on the percentage of the state's avian SGCN list that is migratory
    - The user component is based on an estimate of the number of birdwatchers per state
    - The formula uses a two-thirds weighting scheme that favors the biological component
- The consideration of a tiered, or hierarchical, recognition program (Appendix V) for states that achieve significant attainment in reaching contribution goals and participatory longevity in Southern Wings, or a combination of the two.

GOVERNANCE OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Overview

The BCC serves as the organizational home for Southern Wings. A Technical Committee—comprised of representatives from participating state fish and wildlife agencies, regional associations, and flyways—reviews and recommends projects and provides strategic guidance to the program. Each contributing entity may appoint a representative to this committee.

In addition to state participants, partners such as, but not limited to, American Bird Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society, and USFWS are eligible to join in a non-voting, advisory capacity. However, this option has not yet been used.

The Technical Committee convenes virtually 4–6 times per year, depending on project needs and member availability. Program coordination is provided by AFWA staff Deb Hahn (International Relations Director) and Bradley Wilkinson (Bird Conservation Program Manager), who allocate approximately 10–15% of their time to Southern Wings. Kendra Wecker, of the Ohio Division of Wildlife, currently serves as the lead state agency representative guiding the program.

Recommendations

Governance and Structure

Task Force members agreed that the current governance model could be enhanced by increasing Director-level engagement. Greater leadership involvement would help guide strategic direction, strengthen program ownership, and cultivate additional champions for Southern Wings.

Program Implementation

There was discussion around simplifying program implementation. Members considered whether a more centralized model—similar to Fall Flights, where a single organization (i.e., Ducks Unlimited) manages and distributes funds to a select group of partners—might increase efficiency. Currently state agencies contribute to Southern Wings projects through several mechanisms including through flyway councils, via U.S.-based NGOs, or directly to in-country partners. The purpose of maintaining these complementary mechanisms has traditionally been to provide maximum flexibility to state fish and wildlife agencies to avoid disincentivizing participation. However, the maintenance of this flexibility may come at the expense of programmatic efficiency, but several aspects of the program raise concerns about the applicability of a single- or limited-organization model to Southern Wings:

- The broad range of species, countries, and partners involved
- The diversity of required habitats and conservation actions
- A strong preference among state fish and wildlife agencies to maintain direct biological connections with projects
- Legal or policy restrictions in some states on transferring funds directly to NGOs
- The administrative complexity of managing many small transactions across numerous partners

To provide the Task Force with a realistic example of what a single-organization pass-through may resemble, the National Audubon Society was invited to present on Conserva Aves, which may provide one platform to address some of these challenges. Discussions also considered additional program models including the creation of an alternative channel for allowing a small percentage of state contributions to be pooled into a pot of discretionary funds. This would not allow states to choose the project and is similar to the Fall Flights model. Some states value their ability to choose projects, even if their contributions are relatively small.

IN SUMMARY, THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS: The governance recommendations are categorized into short-term and long-term recommendations. The newly formed Advisory Committee will likely be responsible for developing a timeline to implement the long-term recommendations.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish an AFWA Committee (modeled after the Fall Flights Advisory Committee) to offer strategic oversight for the program. See draft Terms of Reference in Appendix IV.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a plan to hire a dedicated, part-time program coordinator to support the program's continued growth and effectiveness. This plan could incorporate a goal-based trigger for pursuing the hiring of a dedicated coordinator. For example, consider setting a maximum limit on what percentage of overall state funds could be used to support a coordinator, along with programmatic goal attainment, as a triggering mechanism (e.g., no more than 10% of total funds can be used for coordination, and state contributions must have reached 50% of the overall programmatic goal, at which point the hiring of a coordinator should be considered). Explore whether partners would be willing to contribute to a coordinator position and whether it would make sense to start by pursuing funding for a coordinator through a Multi-state Conservation Grant to show return on investment before using state fish and wildlife agency funds.
- Explore simplified implementation models, including the possibility of routing funds through a specific, limited network of NGOs or leveraging initiatives such as Conserva Aves.
- Consider the addition of a complementary contribution channel. The first, primary channel would maintain the current model of project-specific selection by states while a second, complementary channel would allow a small percentage of self-identified state contributions to be pooled into a discretionary pot that could support 1 or more projects, as selected by the program administrators (i.e., AFWA support staff).

GROWING THE PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Overview

Despite decades of recognition that effective conservation of migratory birds requires investment on an international scale, and that specific drivers of population declines may occur far from breeding areas, long-term monitoring continues to indicate downward trends across habitats and across taxa. In fact, the issues of habitat loss and degradation, collisions with infrastructure, phenological mismatch, and other threats affecting all birds scale with migratory distance, such that those species moving the farthest from breeding to non-breeding areas and vice versa are facing some of the most significant barriers to recovery. The recognition of this need prompted the creation of Southern Wings.

Over the course of the fifteen-year history of Southern Wings, state contributions to the program have generally increased over time. However, significant opportunities for improvement remain. Total state contributions, for example, can vary by $50,000 or more between consecutive years. Individual states themselves show variability in both their participation and contribution levels; while new state contributions or increased contributions from participating states have generally exceeded reductions, a more stable and sustained growth trajectory is preferable both on the programmatic level and in each state. For example,

> BCR has a long history of successful cross-border conservation for migratory birds and is a strong advocate for collaborative action across the full annual cycle. We're excited to partner with Southern Wings to help advance this critical work- because migratory birds know no borders.
>
> *~ Tammy VerCauteren, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies*

although 41 states have participated in Southern Wings throughout the life of the program, in any given year, contributions are received from fewer states.

Support variability not only hinders more rapid growth of the program, but it also reduces certainty for on-the-ground partners implementing conservation projects. Large influxes of unanticipated funding, for example, may not be used as efficiently as they would have otherwise been due to a lack of adequate time for planning and strategy development; likewise, abrupt reductions may force partners to reallocate or search for additional funds to make up for lost support. While Southern Wings recommends a three-year commitment from states before accepting project-specific contributions, projects frequently require more than three years to complete, especially if early successes are realized and look to be expanded.

While it is recognized that states themselves are often challenged by dynamic and unpredictable budgetary environments, the goal of the Task Force was to promote not only awareness of the program among non-contributing states, but to foster a normalization of the program among states such that contribution levels would be sustained and consistently grown over time.

Recommendations

The Task Force discussed various options to advance the growth of the program and enhance understanding among both state fish and wildlife agencies and partners. Ideally, the first recommendation—developing a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy—would be completed within the first 6 to 8 months following the adoption of this report.

Nicaragua: Agroforestry workshop for farmers

IN SUMMARY, THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS:

- Develop a Marketing and Communications Strategy: Collaborate with AFWA's Outreach & Marketing Working Group, Patricia Allen, and relevant partners to design a marketing and communications strategy. The primary audience should include state fish and wildlife agency staff (including Directors) and conservation partners. Elements to consider include providing clear justification for full annual cycle conservation through Southern Wings; exploring the potential value of conducting a state-level survey, developed with input from social scientists, to identify barriers real and perceived to participation and support; developing outreach and education materials; and crafting an elevator pitch.
- Launch a National Spring Campaign (Spring 2026): Design and implement a national outreach campaign timed with the 2026 spring migration. The campaign could include virtual presentations to state fish and wildlife agencies across the country, and could leverage existing meetings such as AFWA, Flyway Councils, Joint Ventures, and regional associations to share project updates, introduce partners, and discuss state contribution goals. Consider if this could be coordinated with World Migratory Bird Day and Environment for the Americas.
- Engage state fish and wildlife agencies and NGO partners to identify and develop alternative funding options, recognizing that access to novel sources of discretionary funding is likely one of, if not the most, significant barrier to participation in the program.
- Demonstrate and Communicate ROI: Identify ways to demonstrate a more compelling and quantifiable ROI for participating states. This could include metrics and case studies that show impact. It could also include, in coordination with partners, site visits to projects for Directors or other agency personnel to examine firsthand outcomes from program contributions.
- Clarify Allowable Use of Pittman-Robertson Funds Internationally: Collaborate with the USFWS to communicate the allowable uses of Pittman-Robertson funds in countries beyond Canada.
- Ensure Project Eligibility Under the Collaborative Conservation Initiative: Work closely with the USFWS and state fish and wildlife agencies to confirm that Southern Wings projects are recognized as eligible activities under the Cooperative Conservation Initiative.

APPENDIX I: 10 YEAR VISION: TARGETS, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES (2010-2020)

Targets: Targets represent the overall desired condition that the Southern Wings seeks to achieve.

T1. Sustainable populations of migratory birds

T2. Fifty states participating in the Southern Wings Program

T3. Annually increasing contributions to support critical projects facilitated through the Southern Wings Program

T4. Southern Wings Program support to critical projects.

T5. Enhanced relationships between state wildlife agencies and Mexico, Central America, South America and Caribbean partners

T6. States and project partners support annual-life cycle conservation of shared species

Goals & Objectives : The goals lay out our long-term plan. Each goal is 1) linked to targets, 2) impact oriented, 3) measurable, and 4) time limited (generally >10 years). The objectives are 1) results oriented, 2) measurable, 3) time limited (generally 3-10 years), 4) specific, and 5) practical. Each objective defines in specific terms what Southern Wings hopes to achieve for its intermediate results on the way to achieving one or more goals. The Southern Wings' committees will develop the specific strategies necessary to implement the goals and objectives that will then define an annual work plan.

GOAL	OBJECTIVES
Goal 1: (T2, T3) Fifty States contribute resources to and participate in the Southern Wings Program.	**Objective 1.1:** (G1) By 2017, 35 States are consistently contributing resources to the Southern Wings Program.
Goal 2: (T3) By 2022, $2 million is invested annually by states in Southern Wings projects.	**Objective 2.1:** (G2) By 2017, $400,000 is invested annually in Southern Wings projects by states.
Goal 3: (T1, T6) By 2022, sixty state agency priority migratory bird species have benefited from Southern Wings projects through land conservation and acquisition, management to improve habitat, outreach to private landowners and cooperators, and government and landowner support for conservation of important habitats.	**Objective 3.1:** (G3) By 2017, thirty migratory birds of priority to the states have benefitted from Southern Wings projects.
Goal 3: (T1, T6) By 2022, sixty state agency priority migratory bird species have benefited from Southern Wings projects through land conservation and acquisition, management to improve habitat, outreach to private landowners and cooperators, and government and landowner support for conservation of important habitats.	**Objective 4.1:** By 2017, twelve States will have initiated formal partnerships with partners at the project level; conduct onsite visits and discuss how to enhance the partnership.
Goal 5: (T4) By 2022, twenty-four project areas have been or are being supported by the Southern Wings Program.	**Objective 4.1/5.1:** (G4, G5) By 2017, for the thirty birds identified in Objective 3.1, all have Southern Wings projects on the ground addressing critical species conservation needs.
Goal 6: (T5) By 2022, communication and information exchange is occurring among participating state wildlife agencies and between agencies and Mexico, Central America, South America and Caribbean partners.	**Objective 6.1:** (G6) By 2017 establish forums and mechanisms to increase communication, exchange of information and sharing of experiences amongst participating state wildlife agencies and between participating state wildlife agencies and on the ground project partners.

APPENDIX II: 2012 SOUTHERN WINGS RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION URGING PARTICIPATION IN THE SOUTHERN WINGS PROGRAM AND ANNUAL LIFE CYCLE CONSERVATION OF THE OVER 380 MIGRATORY BIRDS THAT WINTER IN MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA, AND THE CARIBBEAN

WHEREAS, 47.7 million bird watchers generated over $82 billion in total industry output, 671,000 jobs, and $11 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenue in 2006; and

WHEREAS, regional and local economic impacts of bird watching are significant in such places as the Rio Grande Valley of Texas where nature tourism, dominated by birding, brings in over $300 million a year to the economy; and

WHEREAS, 2012 marks the 25th anniversary of Bird Habitat Joint Ventures, 22 years of North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants, 12 years of State Wildlife Grants, and 11 years of Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act funding, which cumulatively have invested hundreds of millions of dollars into the conservation of priority migratory birds; and

WHEREAS, science shows us that in order to protect our state-based bird conservation investments we also need to conserve migratory birds throughout their annual life cycle; and

WHEREAS, conservation of priority migratory birds of importance in North America hinges on their conservation in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean; and

WHEREAS, conservation work in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean is cost effective, and is implemented by professional partners with a track record of conservation success; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Wings Program, a partnership of state fish and wildlife agencies, was created in 2009 to provide a mechanism for state wildlife agencies to partner in conservation projects for shared priority species with partners in Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean; and

WHEREAS, each year the Southern Wings Program has continued to increase the number of participating states and amount of funds contributed; and

WHEREAS, the Southern Wings Program developed a 10-year Vision in March 2012, which set an annual goal of $2 million a year in voluntary state contributions to projects that support the conservation of state wildlife agency priority species throughout the Hemisphere.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED,
that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies endorses the 10-Year Vision of the Southern Wings Program and encourages continued development and implementation of the actions and strategies needed to achieve the goals and objectives of the Vision; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies encourages states to strive to maximize their voluntary funding for annual life cycle conservation in support of the 10-year Vision to achieve the $2 million annual goal for the conservation of shared priority species.

Submitted by the Bird Conservation Committee, September 2012

APPENDIX III: 2024 SOUTHERN WINGS RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION 2024-08-10
RECOGNIZING THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF SOUTHERN WINGS

WHEREAS, the United States and Canada have lost 1 in 4 breeding birds since 1970, with populations of native migratory species estimated to have declined by 2.5 billion individual birds; and

WHEREAS, over half of the bird species breeding in the United States and Canada are Neotropical migrants, spending up to eight months of the boreal autumn, winter, and spring in Latin America and the Caribbean; and

WHEREAS, it is essential that threats to migratory birds be addressed throughout their full annual cycle and across their entire distribution in order to successfully recover declining species and maintain robust population levels of abundant species; and

WHEREAS, state fish and wildlife agencies play a critical role in the conservation of migratory birds as a public trust resource for the benefit of over 96 million birdwatchers spending $250 billion annually watching wildlife; and

WHEREAS, State Wildlife Action Plans and associated funding can facilitate regional collaboration to benefit shared species of greatest conservation need, many of which are migratory birds vulnerable to habitat loss in stopover and non-breeding areas; and

WHEREAS, Southern Wings, a partnership of state fish and wildlife agencies, was created to provide a mechanism for state agencies to collaborate in the development of conservation projects for shared priority species in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, where conservation investments are cost-effective and implemented by capable partners with proven histories of conservation success; and

WHEREAS, Southern Wings has facilitated over $4.2 million in contributions from 41 state agencies, in combination with over $9 million in leveraged partner funding, to conserve, restore, or manage over 1.5 million acres of migratory bird habitat via the implementation of 26 projects in 12 countries directly impacting at least 81 species of greatest conservation need; and

WHEREAS, Southern Wings celebrates its 15th anniversary in September 2024;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ("Association") recognizes the substantial and visionary accomplishments of Southern Wings over the past fifteen years for the conservation of priority migratory bird species throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, complementing the existing work of state fish and wildlife agencies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Association reaffirms its commitment to expand and grow Southern Wings by encouraging participation in the program by state fish and wildlife agencies for the benefit of migratory birds via the contribution of maximal voluntary funding for full annual life cycle conservation.

Submitted by the Bird Conservation Committee.

APPENDIX IV: SOUTHERN WINGS ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE (DRAFT)

The Southern Wings Presidential Task Force was established in 2024 to chart the course for the program to achieve the goal of investing $2 million annually in Southern Wings. One recommendation was to create a Southern Wings Advisory Committee to continue the development of and oversee and promote the program to reach its goal.

Purpose: The primary purpose of the Southern Wings Advisory Committee is to oversee the implementation of Southern Wings. Specific outcomes are to:

- Oversee Southern Wings
- Implement the Presidential Task Force Report Recommendations
- Set priorities
- Help achieve funding objectives
- Promote the program
- Highlight program outcomes/benefits
- Report program progress to AFWA leadership and membership

Governance: The Committee will attempt to achieve consensus, emphasize shared decision-making, and equal participation among members.

Budget: The annual budget, if necessary, will be determined by the Committee, with approval from the AFWA President. It will be the responsibility of the Committee and its members to source its financial needs, which could include receiving funds from NGO partners, states, grants, AFWA, or other opportunities.

Membership and Structure: AFWA's President will appoint or confirm members as needed. The Chair will rotate every 3 years. The Chair will be a state fish and wildlife agency Director. The Southern Wings Technical Committee will be the technical advisory body for the Advisory Committee. To be inclusive of our project partners and colleagues outside of the U.S., the Advisory Committee will consider how best to ensure those voices are heard.

Members will consist of Directors, state leadership staff, and partners and include the following.

- Each regional association (i.e., Midwest, Northeast, Southeastern, Western) and the National Flyway Council shall identify one representative (Director or senior leadership staff) to sit on the Committee and submit their names to the AFWA President and Executive Director.
- Chair of the AFWA Bird Conservation Committee
- Partners in Flight
- Partners may be invited by the AFWA President including, but not limited to, National Audubon Society, American Bird Conservancy, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, and Ducks Unlimited.

Authority: Serving at the call of the AFWA President, the Southern Wings Advisory Committee will be a standing committee to oversee implementation of and report annually on the program, as well as provide guidance and advice to AFWA's President and Executive Director as requested.

Meeting Frequency: At the prerogative of the Chair, with the recommendation that the Advisory Committee meet at least twice per year.

Quorum: A simple majority will comprise a quorum.

APPENDIX V: STATE INVESTMENT GOALS, THE 2030 CHALLENGE, AND A RECOGNITION PROGRAM

State Investment Goals (Appendix VI): They are lofty goals and something to strive for to meet the $2 million annual goal. They need to be accompanied by new funding sources in many cases and will include efforts to get state fish and wildlife agency partners to assist states in meeting their goal.

Implementation:
- Use SGCN weighted formula, round off the goals.
- Update the investment goals once the 2025 SGCN lists are available.
- Roll out the investment goals and the challenge at the September AFWA meeting: Reach 25% of your funding contribution goal by 2030.
- Review the formula, tiers, and recognition program awards in 2030.

Potential Recognition Tiers:
- <25%: Bronze (snowy plover)
- 25% to 50%: Gold (grasshopper sparrow)
- 51% to 100% or more: Platinum (cerulean warbler)

Number of states that are in each tier based on state contributions for the 2024-2025 year (States not participating: 26):
- <25%: 17 states
- 25% to 50%: 3 states
- 51% to 100% or more: 4 states

Visualizing Tiered Contribution Achievements:
- Provide some options for visualizing the tiers. Task Force members indicated a preference for a map. There also was an interest in including flyways on the map.

Recognition Program:
- Develop an annual recognition program.
- From 2025 to 2030, consider
- Award for states in a tier
- Award for moving up a tier
- Award for first time contributors
- Award for sustained contributors – 10 year, 15 years, etc. (Unlike Fall Flights, Southern Wings contributions can fluctuate, and some states move in and out of the program depending on the year.)
- Regional awards based on flyways or regional associations (spirit of connectivity).

APPENDIX VI: STATE INVESTMENT GOALS

State	State-investment Goal	25%	50%
Alabama	$34,000	$8,500	$17,000
Alaska	$23,000	$5,750	$11,500
Arizona	$40,000	$10,000	$20,000
Arkansas	$32,000	$8,000	$16,000
California	$97,000	$24,250	$48,500
Colorado	$39,000	$9,750	$19,500
Connecticut	$39,000	$9,750	$19,500
Delaware	$31,000	$7,750	$15,500
District of Columbia*		$0	$0
Florida	$74,000	$18,500	$37,000
Georgia	$49,000	$12,250	$24,500
Idaho	$29,000	$7,250	$14,500
Illinois	$57,000	$14,250	$28,500
Indiana	$46,000	$11,500	$23,000
Iowa	$36,000	$9,000	$18,000
Kansas	$37,000	$9,250	$18,500

State	State-contribution Goal	25%	50%
Kentucky	$38,000	$9,500	$19,000
Louisiana	$36,000	$9,000	$18,000
Maine	$31,000	$7,750	$15,500
Maryland	$44,000	$11,000	$22,000
Massachusetts	$43,000	$10,750	$21,500
Michigan	$51,000	$12,750	$25,500
Minnesota	$41,000	$10,250	$20,500
Mississippi	$33,000	$8,250	$16,500
Missouri	$43,000	$10,750	$21,500
Montana	$21,000	$5,250	$10,500
Nebraska	$34,000	$8,500	$17,000
Nevada	$33,000	$8,250	$16,500
New Hampshire	$31,000	$7,750	$15,500
New Jersey	$47,000	$11,750	$23,500
New Mexico	$30,000	$7,500	$15,000
New York	$66,000	$16,500	$33,000
North Carolina	$50,000	$12,500	$25,000
North Dakota	$31,000	$7,750	$15,500

State	State-contribution Goal	25%	50%
Ohio	$58,000	$14,500	$29,000
Oklahoma	$34,000	$8,500	$17,000
Oregon	$29,000	$7,250	$14,500
Pennsylvania	$54,000	$13,500	$27,000
Rhode Island	$31,000	$7,750	$15,500
South Carolina	$40,000	$10,000	$20,000
South Dakota	$24,000	$6,000	$12,000
Tennessee	$43,000	$10,750	$21,500
Texas	$77,000	$19,250	$38,500
Utah	$30,000	$7,500	$15,000
Vermont	$31,000	$7,750	$15,500
Virginia	$47,000	$11,750	$23,500
Washington	$34,000	$8,500	$17,000
West Virginia	$34,000	$8,500	$17,000
Wisconsin	$40,000	$10,000	$20,000
Wyoming	$26,000	$6,500	$13,000