



Communications Framework

2019 TO 2021



Communications and outreach efforts to support effective habitat conservation and rural communities within the landscapes of the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Communications Framework marks the first time the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) has charted a course for strategic communications to enhance progress toward the mission and goals of our partnership. It is the result of an iterative process led by the NGPJV Coordinator, Management Board, our Communications Committee, and ad hoc reviewers from the Joint Venture communications community. It was built in part from a Strategic Communications Discussion Guide and Handbook, Audience and Media Coverage Research Brief, and a Strategic Communications Planning Workshop provided and facilitated by Resource Media Inc., in November 2017. It has also been informed by additional surveys conducted by the Northern Plains Conservation Network, World Wildlife Fund, and the Badlands Advisory Group in North Dakota (see Appendices). This framework reinforces and supports the current strategic focus of the NGPJV toward its mission to conserve priority bird habitats through partnership-driven, science-based projects and programs.

This document presents a framework on which to direct a strategic and practical approach to NGPJV communications through 2021, emphasizing targeted and consistent messaging that will advance our mission. Transparency

and accountability to our stakeholders, funders, Management Board, and partners are essential to our success, and we have designed this framework to provide both.

To help facilitate and direct communications efforts, this framework presents primary messages, identifies key audiences of decision-makers and influencers, and lists primary communication tactics to maximize the impact of our communications. Tactics have been selected based on their relevance in the current technological and societal context, their perceived effectiveness at delivering on our conservation objectives, and their potential to enhance the convening role of the NGPJV in the region. This includes increasing understanding of the role the NGPJV plays in public/private partnerships and regional economies.

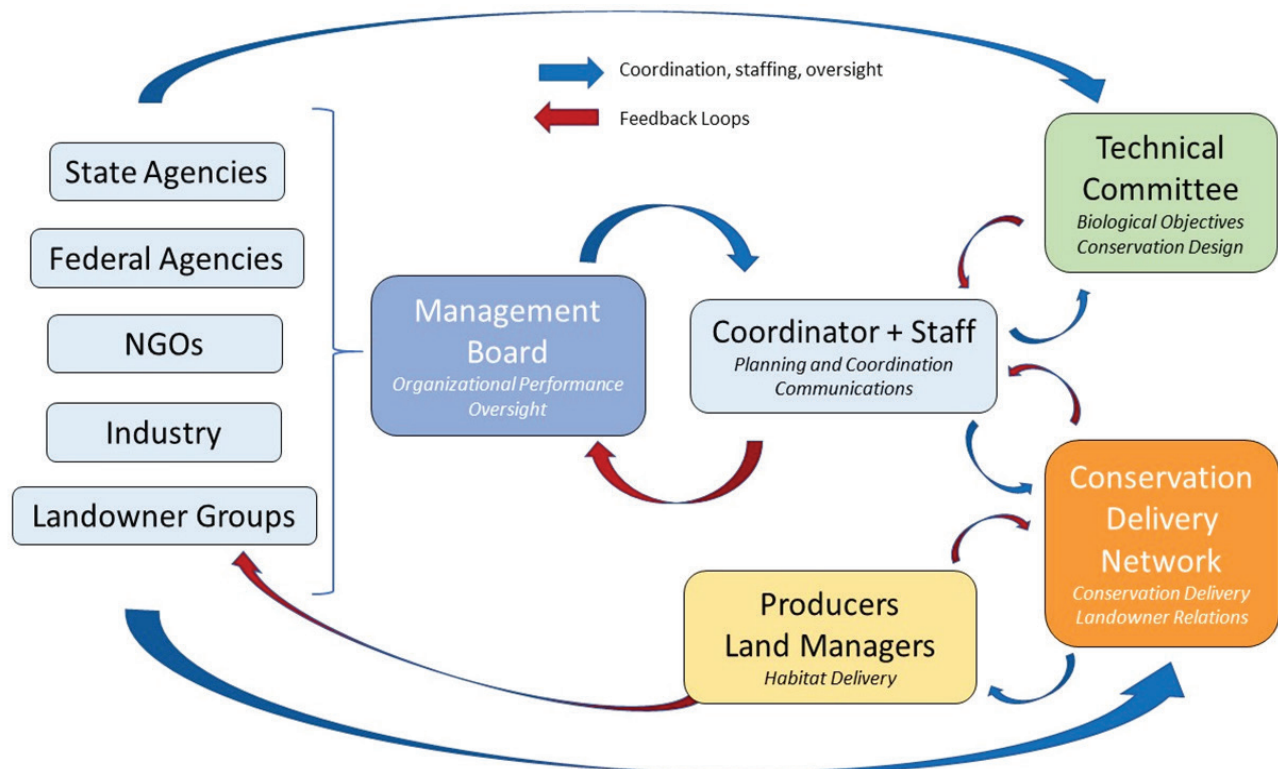
Digital tools such as the NGPJV website, social media, e-newsletters, and e-blasts have become increasingly important mechanisms for conveying messages as partnerships expand. Digital tools will allow the NGPJV to be efficient, responsive, and timely with messaging. Yet face-to-face communications in the form of workshops, partner meetings, and landowner interactions will continue to play a critical role in our communications strategy. Printed outreach materials, especially combined with face-to-face opportunities, will also continue to play a role in our communications strategy. One important component of our long-term strategy will be to assess the effectiveness of these various categories of communication tactics, to prioritize and allocate resources more effectively over time.

This strategic Communications Framework concentrates the NGPJV's communications efforts on priority habitats and communities within the Northern Great Plains in accordance with current direction from the NGPJV Management Board. The Northern Great Plains contains some of the most intact grass and sage prairie on the continent, comprising more than 75% of the landscape, most of it privately owned and managed. Yet conversion and grassland bird declines continue, and these declines are poorly understood by the public and by land managers. Our communications strategies are aimed at raising awareness of these issues, and of the role that voluntary, proactive, and guided

rangeland conservation efforts play in sustaining agriculture and the economic vitality of rural communities. We will also be working to more broadly define the role that Northern Great Plains grassland/wetland landscapes play in providing breeding habitat for waterfowl, another core role of the Joint Ventures.

We will communicate biological values and landscape conservation design through our Conservation Guidance Directory, a decision-support tool providing guidance at the county level across the NGPJV landscape. Future communications efforts will focus on connecting landowners in this region with services and assistance for conservation practices, conserving working lands for the future, and sustaining programs that deliver these resources for multiple stakeholders. Lastly, this framework will strategically support the NGPJV Conservation Delivery Network of private lands biologists given their prominent, value-added role in advancing and implementing on-the-ground conservation solutions throughout the Northern Great Plains to benefit wildlife, agriculture, and rural communities.

Organizational structure of the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture partnership.



MISSION

The mission of the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) is to support and implement protection, enhancement, and restoration of prairie grassland, shrub-steppe, wetland, and riparian ecosystems, with an emphasis on sustaining and increasing populations of migratory and resident birds.



The Long-billed Curlew, North America's largest shorebird, is a grassland nester throughout the NGPJV geography.

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INTRODUCTION

The following is a framework of goals and tactics to help guide to action a communications plan for the NGPJV's staff, Technical Committee, and Management Board. Strategic communications will provide guidance for targeted and consistent messaging to achieve the goals of the NGPJV.

NGPJV GOALS

A diverse landscape of some of the most intact mixed prairie landscapes in the United States exists within the four states of the NGPJV: Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Upon the establishment of the NGPJV in 2002, it was the goal to maintain and increase the populations of high priority wetland, grassland, forest, riverine, and riparian bird species through collaborations with public-private partners. These habitats contain continentally and regionally significant habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and grassland birds. An overarching goal of the NGPJV is to secure and enhance habitats for these bird species, and to seek and facilitate collaboration among a diverse group of partners working together with federal, state, and private conservation programs, projects, and

land management activities to achieve habitat conservation and enhancement.

One of the key roles of the NGPJV is to lead and assist our partners in assessing and analyzing national, international, and regional bird conservation initiatives, to develop scientifically based bird habitat conservation objectives and priorities for the NGPJV and state and local landscapes. Our work is guided by our management board-approved 2006 Implementation Plan (2020 revision in progress) and the many federal, state and private land management and species conservation plans of our partners. It is through all our efforts and continued passion for conservation that affects change, and the NGPJV Management Board welcomes the participation, support, and advice of

any and all persons and organizations interested in working together to conserve bird habitat in the Northern Great Plains region.

We began this communications planning effort by following the example of successful efforts of other Joint Ventures, identifying a set of Outcome Goals and Means Goals related to our efforts. These helped frame the discussions of our Management Board as we developed an overarching goal and a first set of Ecological, Action, and Awareness Goals. These goals will inform not only the communication tactics that flow from this framework, but also our 2019 Implementation Plan revision.

OUTCOMES GOALS:

- Private and public lands support our wildlife and agricultural heritage and economic well-being for generations to come.
- Sustainable collaborative of private/public partnerships work toward healthy human and natural communities in the Northern Great Plains.
- Profitable management of private lands that incorporates the habitat needs of birds-keep ranchers ranching.
- Sustainably managed native grass and shrub rangelands with enhanced productivity for cattle and birds.
- Reduced conversion of the most intact grass/shrub landscapes, striving for increasing amounts of grasslands.
- Negative population trends of grassland birds are stabilized or reduced.
- Perennial cover in agricultural landscapes is secured to promote healthy soil and provide habitat for wildlife.
- A network of functional wetlands.
- A landscape consisting of a network of grassland, shrub steppe, riparian and wetland habitats that are resilient to climate change.
- Water quantity and quality sufficient to support healthy wildlife populations and current and future generations of community members.
- Riparian habitat quality and natural hydrologic function are restored and sustained to keep our streams flowing and aquifers recharged.

MEANS GOALS:

- Utilize and lead assessments of landscape-level change to inform conservation design.
- Identify capacity gaps and build the Conservation Delivery Network.
- Coordinate data and information sharing through a conservation tracking system and other digital formats (integrate bird, habitat, and conversion data).
- Design and implement coordinated bird monitoring to assess habitat delivery, ensure strategic conservation and provide effective measures of progress toward bird and habitat goals.
- Support state, federal, and non-governmental organization (NGO) programs that enable bird conservation in the region, through a strong NGPJV partnership.
- Ensure adequate capacity exists for bird conservation in the region by leveraging existing resources and pursuing new resources.
- Integrate with, and provide added value to, non-bird and landscape-scale conservation initiatives in the region.
- Employ strategic communications to target audiences necessary to engage for bird conservation.
- Incorporate human dimension elements in all aspects of NGPJV planning and delivery.

With these outcomes and approaches in mind, we developed the following overarching goal for this Communications Framework:

To facilitate conservation efforts in the Northern Great Plains that result in healthy ecosystems and bird populations that benefit private producers and support federal and state agencies and lawmakers as they prioritize grassland conservation in their budgets, plans and policies.

ECOLOGICAL GOALS:

- Stable and thriving bird populations.
- Improved ecosystems services (improved quality and quantity of surface and ground water; stable soils; productive, diverse wildlife populations).
- Increasing amounts of grasslands and shrub steppe habitats with regionally-appropriate assemblages of (preferably native) plant species which provide breeding habitat for priority bird species.
- No net loss of wetlands.

ACTION GOALS:

- Landowners adopting diverse conservation actions/practices into their management systems
- Local community leaders actively supporting grassland, wetland and riparian conservation.
- Unified voices coming together (e.g. hunters, producers, birders, etc.) in support of grassland conservation.
- Greater institutional commitment to conservation of grassland ecosystems.

AWARENESS GOALS:

- Increased recognition of the multiple values of grasslands and the rate and effects of continued grassland loss/conversion.
- Increased awareness of the role that prairie wetlands and riparian systems play in providing both wildlife habitat and a reliable supply of clean water.
- More producers are both recognized as, and self-identify as conservationists.
- Awareness of bird population trends and their role as indicators of environmental health and sustainability.



Managing livestock for win-win solutions to grassland habitat conservation is a primary focus of the NGPJV partnership.

CURRENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

More than 75 percent of the NGPJV landscape is under private ownership, primarily in agriculture, and dominated by pastureland for livestock. Therefore, farmers and ranchers make most decisions on resource management and, subsequently, determine the fate of wildlife habitat in the region. Most of the resource conservation programs available to landowners through USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and state wildlife agencies are voluntary, and educating landowners is often challenged by insufficient staffing and/or resources to provide the needed landowner outreach (i.e. technical assistance) and insufficient incentives (i.e. financial assistance) to make conservation an attractive option. The task for conservation partners is informing and motivating landowners to understand and participate in available conservation programs.

The NGPJV office staff is currently comprised of a Coordinator and half-time Administrative Assistant, with limited resources and relationships to directly deliver outreach to landowners. For the most part, landowners are not familiar with the NGPJV, and understandably communications and outreach efforts are more successful when coming from a trusted source, such as local partners with established relationships. The NGPJV's strength will lie in developing communication messages that resonate with landowners, and using those messages to support partner-based conservation projects and initiatives. Our communication strategy needs to incorporate knowledge of landowner motivations and sharing that information across our Conservation Delivery Network (those biologists and range conservationists working to deliver private lands conservation). The delivery of broad conservation messaging throughout the region lays the groundwork for later interactions by our partners; targeted communications efforts support and drive local conservation partnership projects and goals.

BACKGROUND

Planning for success requires a review of existing resources and looking at how the issue is being talked about in traditional and social media. In the preparation of this framework, we have drawn on a series of stakeholder surveys and media research to assess trends, public awareness, and priorities in the NGPJV geography (see Lit. Cited). These sources include:

- A media research brief conducted by Resource Media in preparation for a Strategic Communications Planning
- Workshop at our November 2017 Board Meeting, and several other regional surveys
- A survey of attitudes regarding conservation in the Badlands and Little Missouri River Valley of North Dakota conducted by the Covenant Consulting Group in 2016
- A survey of the Northern Great Plains by Ipsos (for World Wildlife Fund) in 2016
- A survey of participants in the Northern Plains Conservation Network in 2017

These efforts showed that resource issues are important and frequently covered in regional media, that direct interaction with peers and other stakeholders is seen as the most reliable way to get information, and that there is already some level of

understanding that the NGPJV serves as a nexus for conservation information and partnership facilitation. However, there is also a need to broaden understanding of the level of threats to regional habitats, as well as their relation to bird population declines and other ecological services, and to communicate these concerns across all stakeholder groups. (see References/ Appendices).

AUDIENCES

How people relate to natural resource management and conservation issues is affected by a variety of factors — gender, age, income, education, location, and knowledge to name a few. By directing messages to groups within prioritized areas, our communications and outreach efforts will be more effective and the outcomes can be better evaluated. By clearly defining communications objectives, success can be measured by comparing knowledge levels, perceptions, attitudes, and public opinions before and after implementation and by tracking the actions taken in response.

Although the NGPJV's list of audiences spans an enormous, stratified range, it is apparent that those who own and work the land (i.e. landowners) and those that control, administer, and deliver conservation programs (i.e. resource managers) are the NGPJV's two highest priority audiences, and will most likely remain so in the future.

DECISION MAKERS

These audiences are the ones making decisions that affect our ability to meet NGPJV goals, and include:

- Landowners and Agricultural Producers
- Conservation Organizations
- Public Agency Leaders and Staff
- Policy Makers

INFLUENCER AUDIENCES

These audiences help influence decision makers, either through structured roles or informally. Generally, influencers have the respect and confidence of the public and/or decision makers, and include for example:

- NRCS and Farm Service Agency biologists
- State wildlife agency biologists
- Local community leaders, such as pastors, educators, university researchers
- Media influencers, such as editorial boards, agriculture reporters and bloggers
- Ranching and farming industry organizations
- Local business leaders
- Rural development/extension agencies
- Hunting groups
- Local conservation organizations



MESSAGES AND MESSENGERS

Effective messages, particularly those aimed at changing attitudes, must appeal to our target audiences' emotions and values. The NGPJV identified several shared core values that can be the foundation of effective messages that include preserving a way of life for current and future generations, being good stewards of the land, and conserving our natural wildlife heritage. Successful messages will appeal to landowners' desire to profit and to maintain control of their land and future. We offer the following overarching message for consideration, which is a refinement of the message developed during the NGPJV Management Board's Strategic Communications Planning Workshop. Note that this is a message with three parts, each of which encapsulates an important primary concept, and the three in combination form the overarching message of our effort:

1. For generations, Northern Great Plains ranchers and farmers have been caretakers of the land, providing food, water, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreational opportunities for millions of Americans;
2. Increasing global demand for resources is driving dramatic changes to the landscape, threatening the family farming and ranching tradition and our natural heritage; and
3. By working together to help farmers and ranchers conserve grasslands, shrub steppe and wetlands, we can preserve our way of life and natural heritage for future generations, while still providing the country the food and energy it needs.

For a fourth core element of such messaging, a call to action will be added that can be tailored to specific audiences. For example, with landowners/producers, the call to action may be:

- Contact your local NRCS field office to learn about conservation measures and incentives that can enhance your farm or ranch operation and help to ensure the longevity of your operation; or:

- Visit the NGPJV website to learn about technical and financial assistance available to you through our Conservation Delivery Network of private lands biologists and range management specialists, or:
- Contact the NGPJV office if you would like to learn more about the relationship between grassland birds, their habitats, and agricultural practices, or if you are interested in having birds surveyed on your ranch.

We have further identified core values to shape our communications strategies for each group of primary audiences of decision makers. NGPJV Management Board members understand what motivates these decision makers to act and what stands in their way. Below is a summary of their preliminary analysis of each audience, with recommendations to support grassland conservation.

LANDOWNERS/AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

Landowners and agricultural producers are focused on maintaining their operations and improving their profitability. Landowners need access to conservation programs that fit into and work within their business operations, and need technical and financial assistance to effectively facilitate changes. Two-way communication is needed to tap into local knowledge and to provide technical and financial assistance most consistent with the desire of landowners and managers. Given that resistance to change is a basic human trait, it is important to emphasize examples where incorporation of specific new conservation measures has improved overall performance in regional ranching and farming operations.

CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

Non-governmental conservation organizations are focused on particular natural resource issues, biota, policy issues, or geographies. Progress toward their individual missions will require looking for commonalities with the mission of other NGOs in the region, and in the case of grassland conservation, an understanding that partnership with private land managers is crucial to success. It is important that their efforts acknowledge and support the maintenance of local traditions and cultures.

PUBLIC AGENCY LEADERS & STAFF

Public agency leaders and staff are generally bound by the missions of their respective organizations and take great pride in upholding those missions and mandates. Shifts in direction or mandates are generally influenced by policy changes and/or pressure from the public and special interest groups. The availability of new funding sources, and vocal support and leadership from field staff, can also influence agency priorities and focus attention on grassland conservation. For public agency leaders and staff, prioritizing grasslands will come when they see sufficient political interest and public support for doing so, coupled with adequate resources.

POLICY MAKERS

Getting policy makers to act will require finding lawmakers whose “sweet spots” are connected to the ranching tradition and natural heritage of the Northern Great Plains, providing them sufficient political cover (e.g. vocal support from special interest groups, business leaders, etc.) to turn them into champions for grassland conservation, and providing them opportunities to publicly demonstrate their leadership on these issues.

TACTICS & TOOLS

Here we present a full menu of the tactics and tools available to by the NGPJV in working to achieve its communications goals and needs during the years 2019-2021.

Tables 2-4 (Appendix) display those tactics we expect to be most useful for communicating our primary messages, organized by goals and primary audiences that also addresses our capacity. We expect to implement and adapt our tactics over time as our understanding of our audiences and the effectiveness of our communications improve. The following list of tactics is in roughly priority order, with those tactics we feel will be most effective (and cost-effective) listed first. We have included a variety of tactics that have been employed elsewhere with mixed success. These will be considered on an annual basis through deliberations of our Communications Committee, the NGPJV Management Board and interaction with the Joint Ventures' Communication, Education and Outreach (CEO) team and the communications staff of adjoining Joint Ventures.



NGPJV Management Board meeting locations rotate among the four states and offer opportunities to highlight partner programs while setting direction for the Joint Venture.

FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATIONS

In-person communications between and among the Management Board, Technical Committee, and Joint Venture Coordinator are essential. At a minimum, these should occur as bi-annual meetings, with one of the meetings including interaction between the Management Board and

Technical Committee. Additionally, one-on-one meetings will be important with both current and new Management Board and Technical Committee members, particularly as they shift with agency or NGO staffing changes, to ensure roles are understood. Meetings will also occur

between NGPJV partners and key Congressional members (based on their committee membership associated with these policies), both on the Hill as well as at the home office. Furthermore, communications will occur with agency leaders in national and regional leadership roles with both staff and NGPJV partners. Many of these face-to-face opportunities are represented in the additional tactics listed below (e.g. conferences, field tours, workshops). But we feel it is necessary to emphasize that most positive change comes from one-on-one communications, and the examples below are places that facilitate such interaction.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
Conservation Delivery Network	Once annually	Private Lands Biologists	Coordinator, TC members
Conservation Road Show	2019, 2020	Practitioners/NRCS	Coordinator/Partners
Partner Meetings	Periodic	Agencies and NGOs	Coordinator, Board members
Board & Tech Committee Meetings	Twice a year	Internal	Staff, Board, Tech Committee
Hill Visits	1-2x Annually	Congress, Agency leadership	Coordinator, Board, AJVMB

WEBSITE

The NGPJV website continues to be one of the main tools used to communicate with the public and our collaborators, but it needs continual updates. The website functions as a learning tool for all audiences by providing a comprehensive history of the NGPJV, our mission,



current and past project summaries, and additional resources relevant to our partners and the public at large. It also provides a platform to identify staff, Management Board and Technical Committee members, their respective roles, and contact information. The website is a primary source for up-to-date information about the priorities and activities of the partnership, and houses links to essential resources for NGPJV partners (e.g. plans, articles, reports, Conservation Guidance Directory). It will also serve as an archive of all e-newsletters and provide an interface for additional stakeholders to sign up for e-newsletters and provide updated staff contact information. For the site to remain relevant and current, content should be provided by Management Board and Technical Committee members on a regular basis. NGPJV website: <http://ngpjv.org>

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
NGPJV Website	Update weekly/monthly	All Stakeholders, public	NGPJV Admin Assistant (entry/edit) Coordinator, Board, TC (content)

E-NEWSLETTER/QUARTERLY REPORTS/ANNUAL REPORT

The NGPJV will send an e-newsletter on a quarterly basis (4 times/year) with up to the date information about the priorities and activities of the NGPJV, with hard copies available as leave-behind materials at meetings. These will be an important place to communicate about the implementation plan revision and science findings and activities. Additionally, messaging will articulate the importance of the partnership and the partners' activities, as opposed to focusing on the NGPJV staff as the NGPJV. If an article highlights a project, lists of partners involved should be included. Partners should be asked to author

articles to highlight their successes and primary activities, and to share NGPJV information in their own e-newsletters. We should also provide input to the newsletters of partners (e.g. Conservation Districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Northern Plains Conservation Network).

Summary reports that will highlight the successes of private land programs in the NGPJV as well as the key role of landowner outreach, provide summary statistics and highlight example efforts where landowner outreach made a program more known by landowners and increased participation. In addition to providing summary statistics, they will highlight example projects where a strong partnership was necessary to get the work done (and include quotes from partners in this manner). For each example project, lists of partners involved (and their logos) will be included. Whenever possible, the NGPJV will also provide content to the periodic reports of our partners. This will help to reinforce the importance of partnership in achieving conservation goals. These reports can be available in both electronic (preferred) and (limited) hard copies.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
NGPJV Quarterly Report	Apr/July/ Oct/Jan	All stakeholders	Coordinator, Administrative Assistant Board, Technical Committee -content Conservation Delivery Network – content
Partner Newsletters	Variable	Stakeholder groups	Coordinator, Admin Assistant – content
NGPJV Annual Report (glossy)	February	All stakeholders Funders	Coordinator, Admin Assistant, contractor Partners: Content

FACT SHEETS/BROCHURES/POCKET GUIDES

Fact sheets will be created to accompany tours or face-to-face communications with key Congressional members and, when necessary, agency leadership. Factsheets will include:

- Partners within a given state or district will be listed to demonstrate the public-private partnership.
- Key projects and locations will be mentioned. Photos from the state or district (including those of people) will be highlighted. Messaging may emphasize the benefits to local economies, farmers, sportsmen, or other key constituencies.
- A map of the state or district and where NGPJV projects are located.
- Summary statistics will be provided about NGPJV's accomplishments (including acreage conserved and dollars leveraged).

Factsheets will also include a call to action to support relevant policies and programs. Additionally, the national NGPJV factsheet created by the Joint Ventures' CEO Team, as updated annually, will be utilized or excerpted as needed.

Additional brochures will include summed outputs from our Conservation Guidance Directory, reports and pocket guides from NGPJV partner organizations, e.g. to be used in Workshops, at Field Tours, Road Show events, and Working Group meetings.

FACT SHEETS/BROCHURES/POCKET GUIDES

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
NGPJV Fact Sheets	Annual	Policy makers, agencies, stakeholders	Coordinator, Admin Assistant
National JV Fact Sheets	Annual	Policy makers, agencies	JV Communication, Education and Outreach (CEO) team
Conservation Guidance Directory outputs (Decision Support)	Periodic	Technical Committee members Producers and Practitioners Funding Organizations	Coordinator, Admin Assistant, Technical Committee
Plowprint Report	Updated Annually	Producers, Policy makers	World Wildlife Fund
Pocket Guides	Periodic	Producers/Land Managers	Bird Conservancy of the Rockies; American Bird Conservancy
Conservation Design Flyers	Periodic	Practitioners	Coordinator, Admin Assistant, TC members

PARTICIPATION IN CONFERENCES/MEETINGS

Participation in conferences/meetings will allow NGPJV staff to connect with diverse audiences to grow support for our efforts and identify opportunities for improved effectiveness. They also allow us to ensure that our efforts are in line with national and regional direction within the bird initiatives, federal and state agencies, and other major stakeholder groups. While some major conferences occur annually (e.g. North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference), others are sporadic or one-time efforts. Annual NGPJV Operational Plans should identify those key opportunities for outreach that are time sensitive.



There are many stakeholder meetings that provide opportunities to build working relationships in the region.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
State Wildlife Society Meetings	Annual	State Agencies, Academia	Coordinator, TC members
America's Grasslands Symposium	Biennial	Practitioners, Researchers	Coordinator, TC, Board
Association of F&W Agencies	Annual	State Agencies	Coordinator, Board members

FIELD TOURS

The NGPJV Coordinator, Management Board members, and key partners will organize and attend field tours for Congressional members and their staff, as well as agency leaders, offered to highlight the value of JV, NAWCA, LWCF, FSA, NRCS, and/or Farm Bill conservation funding. These tours will be offered within the home states or districts of key Congressional members (based on their committee membership associated with these policies). The organization of these tours will be led by (non-federal agency) NGPJV partners. All partners within the region, as well as media, should be invited to participate. For more information on how to conduct a tour, we will rely on the San Francisco Bay JV's handbook, as well as the history of success of adjoining (grassland) Joint Ventures. We will also participate in the field tours of these adjoining Joint Ventures whenever possible, since each of our four states has just one Congressman.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
Congressional Staff Tour	Summer Recess (annual)	Policy makers	Coordinator, partners, practitioners

CLASSES/FIELD DAYS/WORKSHOPS

Inviting the public to attend classes or participate in a “field day” is an excellent way to mentor and build positive relationships within a community through face-to-face communication. Creating interest and demonstrating passion and excitement for the work the NGPJV supports could stimulate conversation and present opportunities for new working relationships. Landowner workshops are also a tool for creating two-way communications with conservation practitioners/managers. Landowners have valuable local knowledge, needs and concerns, and generally want to be heard rather than talked to. Workshops can be a great tool to connect landowners with the appropriate resources (i.e. programs and practitioners) and help to establish relationships and begin to build trust – all of which is key to successful program implementation. These workshops can also provide an opportunity for landowners to meet those who implement these private lands programs. They will be conducted in key areas where more landowner participation is needed or a new program is available. Focusing on lands where other landowners are conducting habitat conservation activities can be part of workshops or stand-alone events. Again, partners who implement the private lands programs should be available as well as landowners who have had positive experience. Field events held by NGPJV partner organizations also provide a venue to distribute flyers and brochures, fact sheets and reports highlighting NGPJV priorities and successes.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
Grassland Tour Events	Annual	Practitioners/Producers	SD Grassland Coalition Coordinator: content
Grazing School	Annual	Practitioners/Producers	SD Grassland Coalition
Ranch Tours	Periodic	Multiple stakeholders	WWF, BCR
Conservation Tools Workshops	Periodic	Practitioners/Producers	Coordinator, Partners, Conservation Delivery Network

COMMITTEES

NGPJV will continue to hold bi-annual meetings with the Management Board and the Technical Committee, hosted and moderated by the Joint Venture Coordinator. These will allow for the opportunity for communication and interaction between and within the Management Board and Technical Committee as needed. Effective implementation of this framework may require the formation of additional committees to inform, prioritize and implement the tactics outlined herein. The Management Board will assess the need and call for the creation of such committees based on progress toward objectives and perceived need for resources and collaboration.

A Communications Committee would include those partners interested in collaborating on communications efforts, developing strategies, best communications practices, and shared messages. These efforts would include looking for opportunities to generate the resources necessary to employ effective communications tactics. A Policy committee would include partners (particularly landowners) interested in Congressional communications. This committee would strategize about and plan for tours and face-to-face communications as necessary. Additionally, a member of this committee would participate in the Association of Joint Venture Management Board's bi-annual meetings and serve as a liaison for the NGPJV. For models of such committees, other JV (e.g., IWJV, ACJV) Policy committees might be considered. Teleconferences and email would serve as the primary tools for committee interactions.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
Communications Committee	Face-to-face once annually Teleconference as needed	Internal: Coordinator, Board External: CEO team	Board members, ad hoc
Policy Committee	Face-to-face once annually Teleconference as needed	Internal: Coordinator, Board External: AJVMB	Board members, ad hoc

OPERATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Annual Operations and long-term Implementation Plans provide articulation of a shared vision, goals and activities, providing a "Road Map" for the partnership. In this way they serve as communications tools for the internal audiences of the NGPJV (Staff, Board, Committees) as well as the broader community of stakeholders we serve (e.g. our Conservation Delivery Network, funding agencies), though

generally not the public at large. The upcoming revision of the NGPJV Implementation Plan (Long-term Action Plan) will be essential as it has been 12 years since the partnership has worked together to articulate our shared vision and what actions are needed to achieve it. The Implementation Plan will include specific communications elements related to specific conservation objectives. Annual

Operations Plans outline specific actions to be undertaken by the NGPJV Staff, Management Board and Technical Committee relative to progress toward objectives, priority communications tactics, and project and program commitments given anticipated budgets. They will be drafted during the fall Management Board meetings, and finalized shortly thereafter for the following calendar year.

OPERATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
NGPJV Implementation Plan	Release date 2020	All stakeholders	Coordinator, Board and Technical Committee
NGPJV Annual Operations Plan	Annual by calendar year Release following fall Management Board meeting	Internal: Staff and Board, Technical Committee	Coordinator, in consultation with Board

SOCIAL MEDIA

Other outlets (e.g. Facebook) will be used to connect socially on a periodic basis to engage audiences and encourage interest in the NGPJV. This is an informal outlet that allows for a more candid approach to disseminating immediate information to the public.

Posts may include, but are not limited to:

- Interesting bird sightings within the NGPJV geography;
- Informational posts regarding NGPJV events, periodic/cyclic grant announcements and;
- Relevant shared content from other organizations.

The NGPJV had not yet initiated content on other social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Instagram) as of this writing; the relative value and impact of having content available through additional social media should be assessed on an annual basis. NGPJV Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/northerngreatplainsjv/>



The NGPJV Facebook page is used to share timely stories and news from other Joint Ventures and stakeholder groups.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
NGPJV Facebook Page	Update weekly	All stakeholders, public	NGPJV Admin Assistant (entry/edit) Coordinator, partners and TC (content)

NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS JOINT VENTURE ELEVATOR TALK

The NGPJV will highlight and provide key talking points about its mission, shared goals, structure, and value for staff, Management Board members, and Technical Committee members. They should all be able to deliver it to others when asked, “What is the NGPJV?” This will not need to be a scripted communications piece if internal and other external communications pieces (e.g. e-newsletter, social media, and fact sheets) are deployed properly.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
NGPJV “Elevator Talk”	On demand	All stakeholders, public	Staff, Board, TC Coordinator: content

PRESS RELEASES/NEWSPAPER ARTICLES/PSAS/OP-ED PIECES (LOCAL AND AGRICULTURAL MEDIA)

Press releases will be used to highlight the important policy issues, new opportunities for producers, or success benchmarks. Partners may wish to write letters to the editor in key districts or states. When tours are given, the press will be invited. NGPJV partners with media relationships will take the lead on sending press releases and inviting media participation. Policymakers follow the national news as well as the news for their state or district. Popular magazine articles will be targeted to newsletters and magazines that reach these audiences. If the newsletter or magazine is national in readership, the pitch and content may be coordinated with other Joint Ventures’ communications staff through the Joint Ventures’ CEO Team.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
Farm Bill Release: Opportunities	Following bill signing	Producers, public	Coordinator, Board, partners
Working Lands for Wildlife	Following Project(s) completion	Producers, public	Coordinator, partners (NRCS)

VIDEOS/PODCASTS

Audio and visual aids like podcasts and videos can be an excellent tool to convey information to the public and resource managers, but the NGPJV does not anticipate having the capacity to produce original content in these forms. Nevertheless, multiple NGPJV partners have produced videos highlighting grassland conservation issues and solutions in the region. We need to work together to ensure that future projects include NGPJV “branding” whenever possible, and to work with partners to repurpose these tools to support NGPJV messages.

Example	Timing	Primary Audience	Taskee
NGPJV podcasts:	Periodic	General Public	Coordinator, partners (content) Contractors (production)
Project/Program Videos	Periodic	General Public	Coordinator, partners (content) Contractors (production)

MEASURING PROGRESS

Communications that increase awareness alone are not enough; we desire communication efforts that also increase action. Actions like sign-ups for local conservation programs, ongoing participation in programs, on-the-ground implementation, acres conserved, and anecdotal evidence are all good measures of effectiveness. An honest evaluation will help reveal strengths and weaknesses in our communications strategy, so we can adjust course as needed, and capture lessons learned. We will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts by tactic, as shown in Table 1. Annual assessments by the NGPJV Management Board of the costs and benefits of individual communications strategies will be used to inform the communications elements adopted in annual Operational Plans for the Joint Venture in 2020 and beyond.

FUNDING

We anticipate that adequately implementing the range of tactics outlined in this strategic Communications Plan will cost \$39,600-\$45,600 per year (Table 1), including a portion of the contracted NGPJV Administrative Assistant position (already in place). This will need to come from a variety of sources, as per our discretionary funding from Management Board members, foundation sources, and/or the FWS 1234 funds that support the NGPJV staff and office operations.

Staff time will be prioritized through annual operations planning and tasks will vary. The total amount of staff time allocated to communications is anticipated to be <43% for the Coordinator and >66% for the Administrative Assistant.

The number and frequency of tactics to be deployed on an annual basis will depend in part on the overall availability of funding, and upon the distribution of funding approved by the NGPJV Management Board at their biannual meetings.

Funding table next page ►

Table 1. Tactics, timelines, metrics and estimated cost of implementing the NGPJV Communications Plan.
See Tables 2-4 (Appendix) for a crosswalk of tactics by objective and audience.

Tactic	Timeline (review annually)	Measure		Annual Cost (estimated)	
		Lead	Lag	Outside Services	Staff Time*
Face-to-Face	Ongoing	Cohesive partnership and unified vision			
Website	Content: Ongoing Upgrade: 2 years	# of visitors Average time spent # pages viewed per visitor Top pages viewed	Greater awareness of NGPJV role. More requests for information. Stronger connection to partner programs. Follow-up contacts/inquiries	\$300 to host \$150 survey \$6-10K to redesign	Coordinator: 2% Administrative Assistant: 10%
e-Newsletter	At least quarterly	# readers (subscribers) # of readers engaged (open and click rate)	Greater awareness of NGPJV role. More requests for information. Stronger connection to partner programs.		Coordinator: 2% Administrative Assistant: 5%
Fact Sheets	As needed	Number distributed	Greater awareness Continued/expanded financial support for NGPJV operations.		Coordinator: 1% Administrative Assistant: 5%
Conferences/ Meetings	6-7 per year	# attended # attendees	New or solidified partnerships.	\$5K per year	Coordinator: 1% Administrative Assistant: 2%
Field Tours	Once Annually	Congressional staff attending. Feedback from attendees.	Stronger support for NGPJV and conservation program funding.	\$2,500 per year	Coordinator: 1% Administrative Assistant: 1%
Classes/Workshops	3-4 per year	# attended # attendees	New or solidified partnerships. Interest in, and delivery of new projects.	\$2,500 per year	Coordinator: 1% Administrative Assistant: 1%
Flyers/Brochures	As needed	# distributed	# of new contacts generated. Increased knowledge of NGPJV role.	\$1K for printing	Coordinator: 2% Administrative Assistant: 10%
Quarterly/Annual Reports	Apr/July/Oct/Jan February	# distributed # of online views		\$2K for layout/ printing	Coordinator: 3% Administrative Assistant: 5%
Committees	As needed	Cohesive vision and adaptive management			Coordinator: 1% Administrative Assistant: 1%
Operations and Implementation Plans	Operations annual Implementation Plan 2019	Produced in a timely manner	# times viewed on website Clear Road Map of NGPJV direction moving forward.	\$2K for layout/ printing	Coordinator: 25% Administrative Assistant: 15%
Social Media	Weekly	# of page shares # of page likes # of page engagements	Greater awareness Greater donations (?)	\$200 for boost posts	Coordinator: 2% Administrative Assistant: 10%
NGPJV Elevator Talk	Ongoing	Unified message to enhance understanding			
Local Media	As needed	# published	Increased awareness		Coordinator: 1% Administrative Assistant: 1%
Total Costs and Staff Time				\$19.8 – \$25.8K	Coordinator: 43% Administrative Assistant: 66%

*Staff time: Note that the 43% of the Coordinator's time includes 25% spent on annual operations and long-term Implementation Plan preparation (mostly the latter). For the Administrative Assistant, 66% of her time equates to \$19,800 in contracted services, bringing the total cost of the tactics, as listed, to \$39,600 - \$45,600 per year.

CONCLUSION

Conservation success in the NGPJV will clearly require strategic communications to keep key stakeholders invested in our partnership, build support for action, and provide transparency relative to conservation goals and objectives. Having identified primary audiences, messages and tactics, we will proceed to implement the strategic communications elements outlined herein beginning in January 2019 (with an acknowledgement that many of the tactics are already ongoing). We will place an emphasis on those opportunities that facilitate face-to-face communications with stakeholders and conservation partners (accompanied by appropriate fact sheets/flyers/brochures), supplemented by a strong web presence, regular e-newsletters, quarterly reports and annual reports. Our annual Operations Plans and long-term Implementation Plan will include fully-integrated communications strategies to meet our ecological, action and awareness objectives. The implementation of all NGPJV communication tactics will be conducted under a principle of adaptive management, with regular review and revision by the Coordinator, Management Board and a newly-formed Communications Committee.



The Chestnut-collared Longspur is one of a suite of declining grassland birds with their center of abundance in the Northern Great Plains. Its future depends on well-managed privately-owned rangeland, a focus of our conservation efforts.

Literature Cited/Resources

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Appendices

Table 2. Ecological Goals to emphasize in communications with *Decision Makers/Influencers*, with the most effective tools for targeted efforts to influence decisions.

Goals:	Ecological			
	Stable and thriving bird populations ^{a/}	Improved ecosystems services ^{b/}	Increasing amounts of grasslands ^{c/}	No net loss of wetlands
<i>Decision Makers/Influencers</i>				
Landowners and Agricultural Producers	X	X	X	X
Other landowners and producers Politicians Consumers Commodity industry organizations (beef, corn, etc.) Cattlemen's/livestock groups	Op-eds/articles Face-to-face	Op-eds/articles Face-to-face	Op-eds/articles Face-to-face	Op-eds/articles Face-to-face
Conservation Organizations	X	X	X	X
Local (e.g. Audubon Chapters) Regional (e.g. NDNRT) National (e.g. WWF) Bird/Wildlife Centric (e.g. ABC) Land Trusts (e.g. TNC, MLR)	Website e-Newsletter *Ready-to-use content	Website e-Newsletter *Ready-to-use content	Website e-Newsletter *Ready-to-use content	Website e-Newsletter *Ready-to-use content
Public Agency Leaders and Staff	X	X	X	X
Other agency directors/leaders Agency staff (biologists, field staff, scientists, etc.) Politicians Special interest groups (hunters, commodity groups, etc.)		Social media Flyers/brochures		Social media Flyers/brochures
Policy Makers		X	X	X
Donors Special interest groups (hunters, commodity groups, energy developers, etc.) Business leaders Media Colleagues within their political party Public agency leaders		Annual report Website Op-eds/articles		Annual report Website Op-eds/articles

^{a/} Meeting trend-based objective benchmarks for Watch List grassland birds; maintaining breeding waterfowl at the 80th percentile of the long-term population average.

^{b/} Improved quality and quantity of surface and ground water; stable soils; productive, diverse wildlife populations.

^{c/} With regionally-appropriate assemblages of (mostly native) plant species.

Appendices

Table 3. Action Goals to emphasize in communications with *Decision Makers/Influencers*, with the most effective tools for targeted efforts to influence decisions.

Goals:	Action			
	Landowners adopting diverse conservation actions and practices into their management systems	Local and vocal community leaders actively supporting grassland conservation	Unified voices coming together in support of grassland conservation ^{a/}	Greater institutional commitment to grassland conservation ^{b/}
Decision Makers/Influencers				
Landowners and Agricultural Producers	X	X	X	
Politicians Consumers Commodity industry organizations (beef, corn, etc.) Cattlemen's/livestock groups Ranchers Farmers Lessees of public lands Hobby farmers	Face-to-face Local media Agricultural media Brochures/flyers Workshops/Presentations	Face-to-face Local media Agricultural media Brochures/flyers Workshops/Presentations	Face-to-face Local media Agricultural media Brochures/flyers Workshops/Presentations	
Conservation Organizations	X	X	X	X
Local (e.g. Audubon Chapters) Regional (e.g. NDNRT) National (e.g. WWF) Bird/Wildlife Centric (e.g. ABC) Land Trusts (e.g. TNC, MLR)	Face-to-face (Conservation Delivery Network) (Conservation Guidance Directory) Presentations	Face-to-face (Conservation Delivery Network) (Conservation Guidance Directory) Presentations	Face-to-face (Conservation Delivery Network) (Conservation Guidance Directory) Presentations	Face-to-face (Conservation Delivery Network) (Conservation Guidance Directory) Presentations
Public Agency Leaders and Staff	X	X	X	X
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm Service Agency Bureau of Land Management U.S. Forest Service State wildlife agencies Other agency directors/leaders Agency staff (biologists, field staff, scientists, etc.) Politicians Special interest groups (hunters, commodity groups, etc.)	(Conservation Guidance Directory) Flyers/brochures Website Field Tours Presentations	(Conservation Guidance Directory) Flyers/brochures Website Field Tours Presentations	(Conservation Guidance Directory) Flyers/brochures Website Field Tours Presentations	(Conservation Guidance Directory) Flyers/brochures Website Field Tours Presentations
Policy Makers				X
State elected officials Federal elected officials Federal agricultural committee members State Governors Donors and special interest groups (hunters, commodity groups, energy developers, etc.) Business leaders Media Colleagues within their political party Public agency leaders				Face-to-face Field tours Website Annual Report Fact Sheets

^{a/}Including e.g. hunters, birders, producers, local businesses, etc.

^{b/} Including state and federal agencies, NGOs, landowner coalitions, and industry groups.

Appendices

Table 4. Awareness Goals to emphasize in communications with *Decision Makers/Influencers*, with the most effective tools for targeted efforts to influence decisions.

Goals :	Awareness				
	Increased recognition of the value of grasslands to birds ^{a/}	Increased awareness of the rate of grassland loss/ conversion	Greater understanding of the ecological services provided by intact grasslands ^{b/}	Awareness of the role bird communities can play as indicators of ecosystem health.	More producers recognized as conservationists
Decision Makers/Influencers					
Landowners and Agricultural Producers	X	X	X	X	X
Ranchers Farmers Lessees of public lands Hobby farmers/ranchers Other landowners and producers Politicians Consumers Commodity industry organizations (beef, corn, etc.) Cattlemen's/livestock groups	Local media Agri-media Face-to-face Field tours Road show	Local media Agri-media Face-to-face Field tours Road show	Local media Agri-media Face-to-face Field tours Road show	Local media Agri-media Face-to-face Field tours Road show Op-ed pieces	Local media Agri-media Face-to-face Field tours Road show Op-ed pieces
Conservation Organizations			X	X	X
Local (e.g. Audubon Chapters) Regional (e.g. NDNRT) National (e.g. WWF) Bird/Wildlife Centric (e.g. ABC) Land Trusts (e.g. TNC, MLR)			e-newsletter Conservation Guidance Directory Face-to-face Field tour	e-newsletter Conservation Guidance Directory Face-to-face Field tour	e-newsletter Conservation Guidance Directory Face-to-face Field tour
Public Agency Leaders and Staff	X	X	X	X	X
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Natural Resources Cons. Service Farm Service Agency Bureau of Land Management U.S. Forest Service State wildlife agencies Other agency directors/leaders Agency staff (biologists, field staff, scientists, etc.) Politicians Special interest groups (hunters, commodity groups, etc.)	Local media Agri-media Website landing pages Conservation Guidance Directory Presentations	Local media Agri-media Website landing pages Conservation Guidance Directory Presentations	Local media Agri-media Website landing pages Conservation Guidance Directory Presentations	Local media Agri-media Website landing pages Presentations	Local media Agri-media Website landing pages Presentations
Policy Makers	X	X	X	X	X
Local officials/Municipalities State elected officials Federal elected officials Federal agricultural committee members State Governors Donors and special interest groups (hunters, commodity groups, energy developers, etc.) Business leaders Media Political Party Colleagues Public agency leaders	Field tours Annual reports Fact Sheets Face-to-Face	Field tours Annual reports Fact Sheets Face-to-Face	Field tours Annual reports Fact Sheets Face-to-Face	Field tours Annual reports Fact Sheets Face-to-Face	Field tours Annual reports Fact Sheets Face-to-Face

^{a/} Particularly declining species such as Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Sprague's Pipit.

^{b/} Including value to wildlife, water quality and quantity, carbon storage, soil health.

Communications Framework

2019 TO 2021

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