



# Rio Grande Joint Venture



 *An Invitation to Action*



Rio Grande Joint Venture

*Our Mission:*

*To conserve the avian  
communities and  
habitats of the Rio  
Grande borderlands  
through conservation  
strategies based on  
principles of  
landscape ecology,  
science, technology,  
and sustainability.*

*Snowy Plover*

*Stark*



*Vermillion Flycatcher*

## Rio Grande Joint Venture Scoping Document

### What is a Joint Venture?

A Joint Venture [JV] is a regional, self-directed partnership of government agencies and non-governmental organizations as well as individuals. JVs deliver science-based conservation, and work in support of national and international bird conservation plans. Joint Ventures are directed by a Management Board made up of partner representatives. Joint Venture Partners are dedicated to the conservation of habitats within their region. There are many levels for participation, ranging from membership on the Management Board to participation with technical teams and working groups.

### Why a Rio Grande Joint Venture?

Joint Ventures are an effective bird conservation tool throughout much of North America. JV partners work cooperatively to obtain data needed on bird populations and habitats. By providing more information on the resource, land managers and land owners can make better decisions. Working with partners avoids repetitive efforts and allows funding from multiple sources to be combined, increasing the size and scope of work that can be accomplished. The goal of the Rio Grande Joint Venture [RGJV] is to restore and preserve the important bird habitats of the Chihuahuan Desert and the Tamaulipan Brushlands. The Rio Grande is known as the Rio Bravo in Mexico. The RGJV will use the Texas Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy Wildlife Action Plan bird priority species, issues, and conservation actions as its starting point for bird conservation planning. The RGJV Implementation Plan will be further developed based on the national bird conservation plans including the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, North American Landbird Conservation Plan, regional plans and individual species plans including the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative.

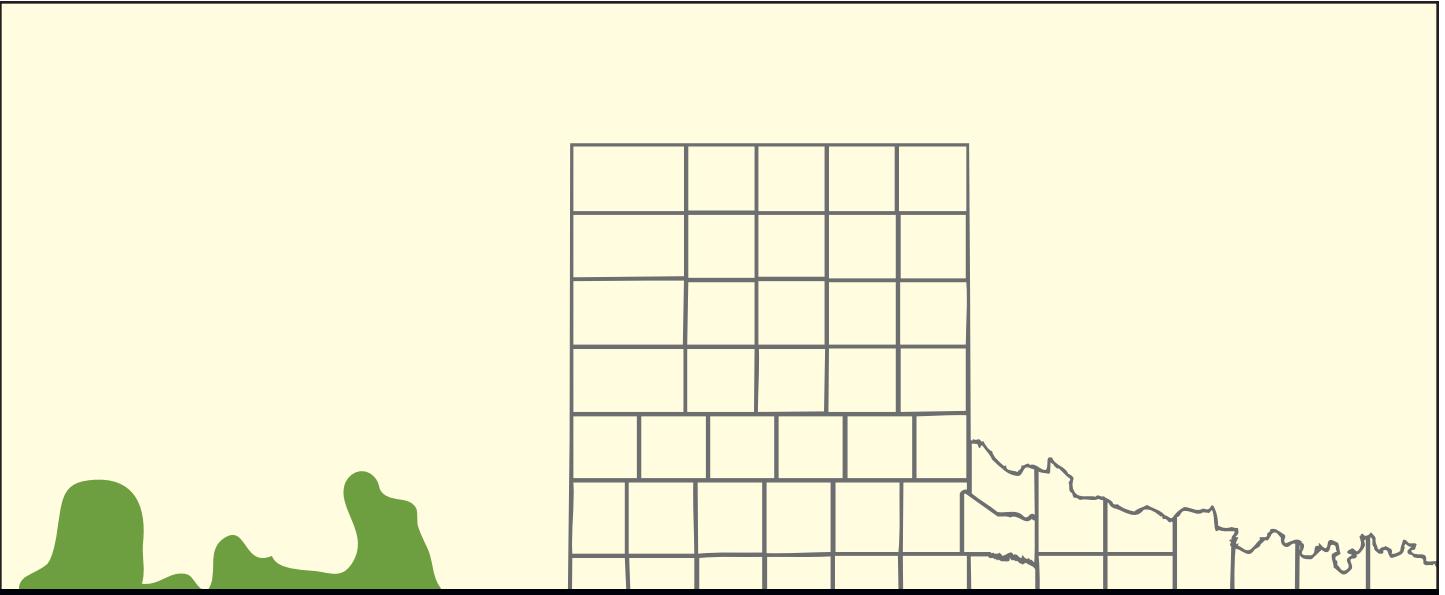
## Why is the Rio Grande Joint Venture Region Important?

The Rio Grande Joint Venture [RGJV] Region is unique. The Rio Grande corridor extends over 1,200 miles in Texas alone. The JV is comprised of two very different and unique Bird Conservation Regions [BCRs], sharing the Rio Grande corridor and many issues. The habitats of the Chihuahuan Desert and Tamaulipan Brushlands Bird Conservation Regions are found nowhere else on earth.

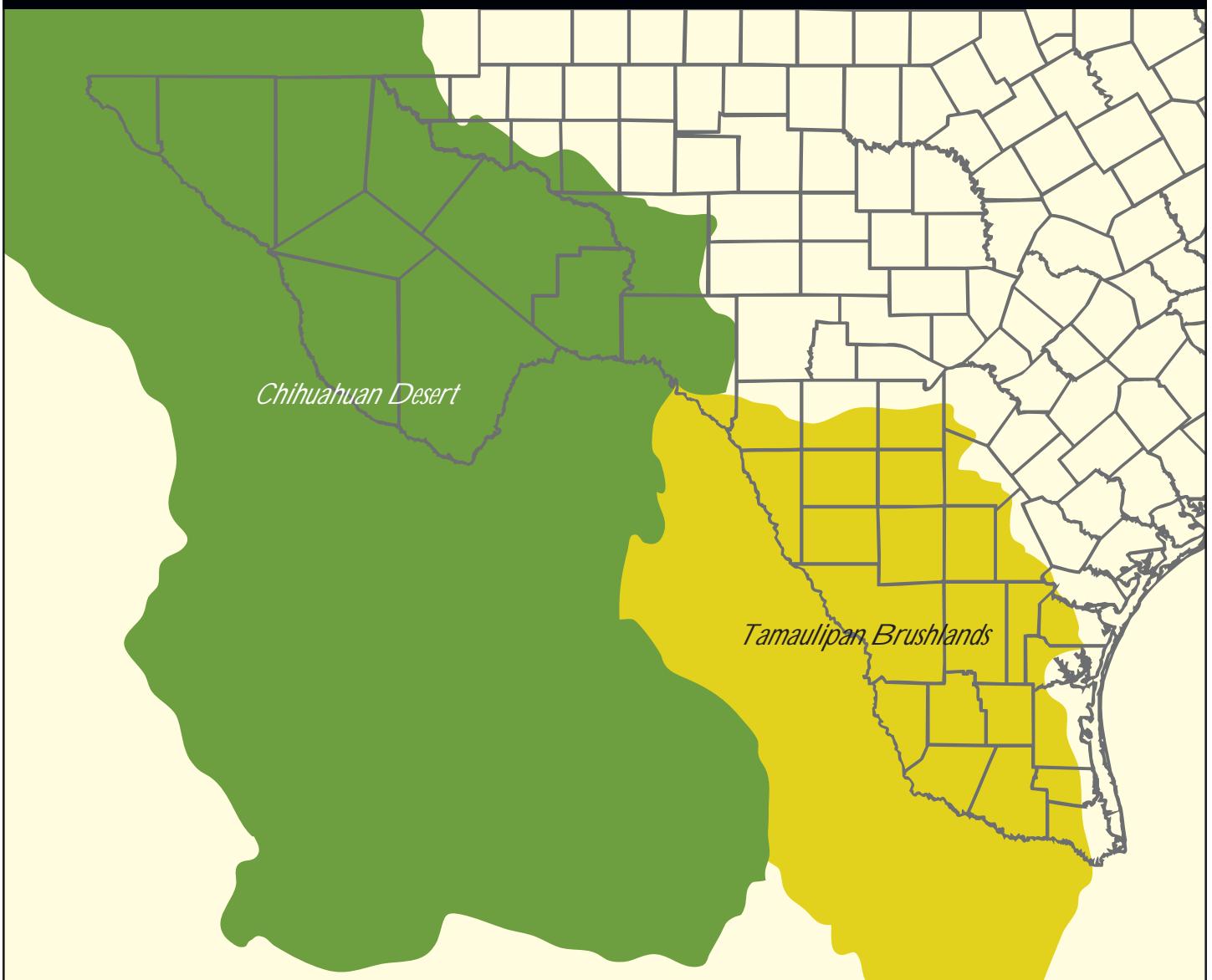
The RGJV Region has exceptionally high bird diversity, and many of these species are found nowhere else in the United States, or have only limited ranges elsewhere. The Region serves as a confluence of migration corridors for Neotropical and Nearctic migrants, providing essential stopover habitats for species that migrate along the Gulf of Mexico from the Atlantic Flyway as well as species from the Central and Mississippi Flyways. The RGJV Region is a junction between temperate and tropical life zones. The Joint Venture includes the most ecologically diverse area of the United States. More bird species have been observed in the RGJV Region than in all but four entire states.

The RGJV Region is losing natural habitats at an alarming rate. Many of the Region's habitats are highly altered or threatened. The Natural Resources Conservation Service conducted the Natural Resources Inventory, a five-year survey of land use changes over the period 1992-1997. This survey found that Texas led the nation in converting rural lands to urban development with an average of 283 square miles of rural open space lost to development each year.

The RGJV Region's birds are poorly understood. As a result of ongoing habitat loss, many bird species are in decline. Several threatened and endangered bird species inhabit the RGJV Region, including the Interior Least Tern, Aplomado Falcon, Spotted Owl and Black-capped Vireo. The Chihuahuan Desert and Tamaulipan Brushlands BCRs harbor a number of endemic subspecies. In addition, comparatively little is known about many common bird species in the RGJV Region. Species-profile information is lacking for some birds, and there are few reliable population indices or estimates of annual survival for many species.



## Rio Grande Joint Venture BCRs





*Chihuahuan Desert*

## Rio Grande Joint Venture Regions



*Tamaulipan Brushlands*

# The Chihuahuan Desert and Tamaulipan Brushlands Bird Conservation Regions

The RGJV Region encompasses two Bird Conservation Regions [BCRs], the Chihuahuan Desert and the Tamaulipan Brushlands. BCRs are areas with similar birds, habitats and resource issues. A total of 38 BCRs occur in the U.S. and Canada. BCRs have been defined to facilitate a landscape-level approach to bird conservation efforts and promote partnerships such as Joint Ventures.

The Chihuahuan Desert and Tamaulipan Brushland BCRs are arid to semi-arid landscapes. Very few natural wetlands exist; most are ephemeral. Livestock production and agriculture are predominant land-uses and numerous man-made wetlands have been created for livestock and wildlife. In both BCRs, mixed grasslands and shrublands have been dramatically altered and are much reduced in area in the last 150 years, primarily due to human intervention.

The Chihuahuan Desert BCR in West Texas has extremely varied topography that encompasses almost 100 peaks that are over one mile high, a “plateau” desert of arid scrub (which covers the majority of the land mass), and the impressively deep canyons of the Rio Grande. Although much of the high country in this BCR is protected in national parks and private reserves, the grasslands of this BCR are highly endangered due to desertification, shrub encroachment and grazing pressure.

The Tamaulipan Brushlands BCR is dissected by the Bordas Escarpment. The land gently decreases in elevation from the west to east and is divided by the riparian zones associated with the Rio Grande and other major rivers. With no mountains and little in the way of permanent flowing water away from major rivers, biological diversity in this BCR is influenced more by variability in temperature, soils and precipitation than topography. The Tamaulipan Brushlands historically included mesquite-acacia savanna, thorn scrub, and grasslands in addition to oak mottes and riparian corridors.



*Altamira Oriole*



*Hook-billed Kite*

## Conservation Challenges in the RGJV



*Band-tailed Pigeon*



*Northern Bobwhite*



*Couch's Kingbird*

# What are the conservation challenges in the Rio Grande Joint Venture?

- \* Riparian corridors in canyons or along the Rio Grande are heavily impacted by human development and livestock and need to be protected, especially where above-ground stream flow occurs.
- \* Habitat fragmentation results in more edge and less interior area in natural habitats. This not only limits species that can use an area by excluding those requiring larger areas of contiguous habitat, but it also results in higher rates of brood parasitism by cowbirds and nest predation.
- \* Alteration of hydrologic regimes, including increased water demands from rapidly growing urban and suburban areas, construction of dams and river channelization have severely reduced the beneficial effects of over-bank flooding and have accelerated xerification.
- \* Invasive plant management programs and habitat protection from overgrazing or urbanization are also needed.
- \* Reliable information on population trends or basic biology does not exist for many bird species that occur only in the RGJV Region; many of these birds are identified as Species of Continental Importance in the North American Landbird Conservation Plan. This lack of basic information makes conservation efforts difficult and is especially critical for the species that have the major portion of their range in Mexico.
- \* In the future, the full participation of partners in Mexico is needed to ensure that challenges common to both sides of the Rio Grande are addressed.
- \* A change in natural fire intensity and frequency has resulted in shrub encroachment into former grasslands. Fire needs to be re-established as a management tool where appropriate.
- \* Appropriate management of grazing resources and associated issues (e.g., overgrazing, erosion, soil compaction, prairie dog control) in all habitats.
- \* Conservation of brushland habitat of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, where 97% of the original habitat area has already been lost.
- \* Agricultural, urban or suburban development, especially in brushlands and grasslands.
- \* Water resources are limited. Water management needs must include strategies to meet ecological needs that sustain and allow restoration of habitats and ecosystems in order to assure continued biodiversity across the RGJV Region; to do otherwise will assure that habitat degradation and decline continues.

## Why should you be a partner in the Rio Grande Joint Venture?

Future bird conservation in Texas will require comprehensive planning and proactive strategies that address people and wildlife issues. In order to keep the common birds of the RGJV Region common, reverse the fortunes of species in decline, and insure adequate habitat for all birds, a regional conservation effort focused on habitat is necessary to move forward and begin to address critical information needs and proactive opportunities including:

- \* Identifying habitat changes that have occurred on the landscape, and determining bird conservation priorities.
- \* Developing techniques to improve data on bird biology, status, and distribution, and habitat requirements.
- \* Improve opportunities for landowners to take part in bird conservation initiatives and habitat conservation.
- \* Build the international partnerships that will extend the Joint Venture conservation model to adjacent Mexico.
- \* Developing projects that will sustain and restore bird habitat throughout the RGJV Region.

Considering the large suite of bird species involved and the vastness of the RGJV Region, these challenges are best met through development of strong team efforts among committed public and private partners. The complexity of issues affecting all-bird conservation in the RGJV Region is a task beyond the capability of any single agency or organization. A landscape approach to the ecology and habitat management of RGJV birds must be based on sound science. Joint Ventures have been most successful when the shift from opportunistic habitat acquisition is complemented by scientific pursuit of predicted landscape sustainability. The objective is to facilitate sustainable bird populations at the BCR scale. Restoration of wetlands and grasslands as well as reforestation will be among the major “on the ground” actions that result from the RGJV and its future planning efforts.



We would like you to become part of the solution by joining us in our effort to conserve the RGJV Region's birds and habitats. Together, we are going to make a difference. Consider what you can bring to the partnership and what role(s) within the RGJV you can

## Your Invitation

fulfill – Management Board, technical or other team member. Partnership is a two-way street, and partners who are willing to help at any level are needed. If you are uncertain what role you, your organization, agency or property should take, please contact the RGJV to discuss the possibilities if you cannot attend the initial meeting.

# What can the Rio Grande Joint Venture and its Partners Accomplish?

- \* Prioritize habitat conservation, including management and restoration, using GIS spatial analysis techniques.
- \* Monitor bird populations and conduct basic research on bird populations and species biology.
- \* Reintroduce or mimic intermittent flooding regimes on watercourses.
- \* Institute habitat-conserving livestock grazing practices.
- \* Work with communities to enhance bird habitat, especially in high development areas.
- \* Conduct research into fire management regimens and their effect on habitats and plant communities.
- \* Restore native habitat at abandoned gas and oil drilling sites.
- \* Develop landowner programs to encourage grassland management techniques to improve habitat.
- \* Develop Landowner Incentive Programs to ensure preservation of critical habitats and wildlife cover.
- \* Education and involvement of landowners in conservation with bilingual educational materials.

With your help, the possibilities are endless!

## Where do we go from here?

The first step in forming the RGJV is the Scoping Document that you are holding. Please join us at our Organizational Meeting where we will be forming a Management Board or at a subsequent Management Board meeting. The Management Board will develop an Implementation Plan for review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. After the Implementation Plan is approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the Rio Grande Joint Venture is eligible for federal funding.

# For more information on Joint Ventures and Landscape-level Bird Conservation Planning

## **Joint Ventures in Texas**

Playa Lakes Joint Venture  
<http://www.pljv.org>

Gulf Coast Joint Venture  
<http://www.gcjv.org>

Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture  
<http://www.lmvjv.org>

Central Texas Joint Venture (forming 2006)

Rio Grande Joint Venture  
Watch Texas Parks and Wildlife's Web site for more information  
<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us>

## **National and International Bird Conservation Plans**

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan  
<http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/NAWMP/nawmp.php.htm>

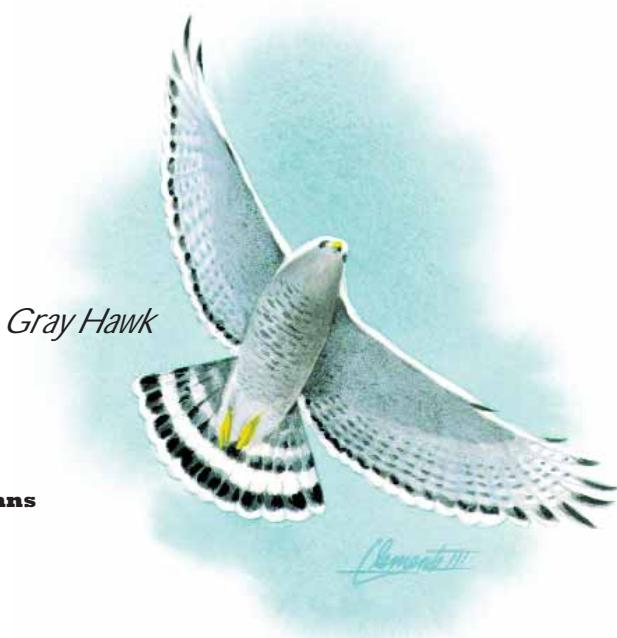
The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan  
<http://www.waterbirdconservation.org>

The United States Shorebird Conservation Plan  
<http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan>

The North American Landbird Conservation Plan  
[http://www.partnersinflight.org/cont\\_plan](http://www.partnersinflight.org/cont_plan)

The Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative  
<http://www.bobwhiteconservation.org>

North American Bird Conservation Initiative. U.S. NABCI Committee.  
<http://www.nabci-us.org>





*Green Jay*

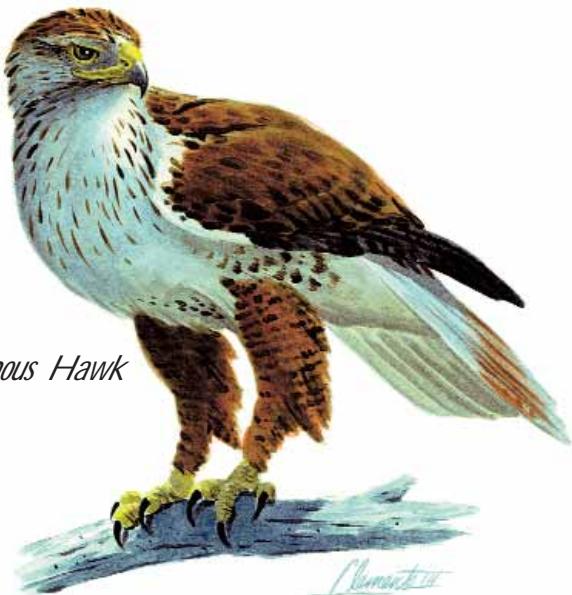


*Plain Chachalaca*

## Top Ten Reasons for All-bird Joint Ventures



*White-throated Swift*



*Ferruginous Hawk*

## **Top Ten reasons for considering a Joint Venture as the first option in delivering habitat conservation:**

- 10** Joint Ventures already deliver all types of habitat across the country. Grassland, bottomland hardwood forest, coastal, prairie pothole and riparian habitats, to name a few.
- 9** Uniqueness. Each joint venture is uniquely adapted to the cultural conditions in their part of the country. There is no single Joint Venture template.
- 8** Joint Ventures have a proven ability to work with many different types of constituents. Joint Venture partners include federal, state and local governmental agencies, tribes, conservation groups, sportsmen's groups, farmers, ranchers, private individuals, small businesses and corporations, among others.
- 7** Joint Ventures use ecological boundaries, allowing coordination across state or national boundaries.
- 6** States support Joint Ventures. Each Joint Venture has at least one state representative on its management board.
- 5** Accountability. Work is planned and done on the basis of objectives and accomplishments. It is opportunistic but not random.
- 4** Joint Ventures leverage funds. Resources are pooled. Partners accomplish together what could not be done alone.
- 3** Expertise. Joint Ventures have proven they can deliver habitat. Each partner brings a special expertise to the table that makes problem solving not a problem.
- 2** Track record. Joint Ventures deliver the goods. Since 1986, Joint Ventures have invested more than \$3.3 billion to protect, restore and/or enhance more 13.1 million acres.
- 1** **Becoming a Joint Venture partner is the smart thing to do.**

*Adapted from the North American Bird Conservation Initiative list.*



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