



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

Science & Research Committee Report

Chair: Terry Steinwand (ND)

Vice Chair: Bruce Thompson (NM)

Thursday March 27, 2008

1:30-5:15pm

Phoenix, Arizona

On-going Business:

Committee reviewed the Science and Research Committee Charge – no additional comments on the charge at the bottom of the agenda.

It was stated that rumors about the committee disbanding are untrue!

Discussion occurred about how to review NCN proposals in the future. All agreed that the time frame for the NCN proposal received was too short and that a thorough review was necessary to ensure the best work is put forward and also to ensure credibility of the committee.

Motion was made and seconded to require a minimum of four weeks to comment on NCN proposals. **A friendly amendment was made and seconded “The committee requires a minimum of four weeks to review NCN proposals and an additional two weeks for revisions before the NCN deadline” The motion passed unanimously with no dissent.**

Summary and further clarification and discussion -- proposals should be submitted at least six weeks prior to the NCN submission deadline or they will be rejected or tabled until the next cycle. At their discretion, the committee has the option of not submitting proposals even after they are revised if they don't meet the committee's expectations.

Paul Dressler presented a progress report on the Natural Resource Monitoring Partnership (hard copy summaries were provided). This database for monitoring projects was developed at the request of states who wanted to know what other monitoring projects might be occurring and what monitoring protocols might be available. Paul highlighted that there has been good participation from federal agencies but minimal participation from states. Early technical glitches may have discouraged some from entering their information but he believes those have been resolved. Any further problems can be reported to Paul and he will address them. **Action item: Paul encouraged the Committee to ask their agencies to participate and enter their monitoring projects.**

Suggestion – have regional association members go back to their associations and emphasize the importance of participating in the database. Paul will send a summary of the benefits to Priya to forward to the Committee to help them spread the word. It was suggested that each regional association set a goal of having at least four new entries. Suggested that Paul visit each of the regional associations and promote the NRMP.

John Kennedy, chair of the Invasive Species (IS) committee gave an update. He reported that the invasive species committee is up and running and is looking forward to working with this committee. They have developed guiding principles and have formulated priorities on which they want to focus. They have three major areas of emphasis with regards to the committee working with others:

- a) increasing communication and coordination with other committees who work on invasive species issues
- b) (possibly) assigning liaisons to serve on those committees (without replacing the critical communication between committee chairs and co-chairs)
- c) increasing communications among and between AFWA staff regarding invasive species issues

Science and research priorities


The group reviewed the three previously set priorities (1. water allocation and quality challenges; 2. invasive species prevention, control, eradication; 3. developing comprehensive monitoring strategies and tools) and discussed which one they should develop a workshop around for the September AFWA meeting. **The workshop will be a recurring event that the Science & Research Committee sponsors, but will be related to structured decision making and adaptive management in the face of scientific uncertainty.** Discussion focused on the objectives and audience for the workshop.

Motion was made, seconded and passed that Invasive Species would be the topic of the first workshop, and to work with the Invasive Species Committee and their priorities in developing it. John Major and Jay Hestbeck volunteered to participate in organizing the workshop and we will seek two to three members of the Invasive Species Committee to serve as well.

More discussion occurred and another motion was made with a friendly amendment as to the (tentative) workshop title “Using invasive species as an example for decision making in the face of scientific uncertainty” This motion passed unanimously.

Bruce Thompson led a discussion on the Committee Composition. **All agreed that the diverse representation that was originally developed was what the committee needs but that we would not be able to secure membership from all the identified groups.**

Regional updates were given by all the regional association members:

See attached (S-R_Regional_Updates-NA2008.doc). 

Bob Szaro of USGS gave an update on the Congressional appropriation of \$1.5million for a “Wildlife and Global Warming Science center.” USGS is working with the Ecological Society and The Wildlife Society to organize a workshop on the topic. A steering committee will be formed to develop program goals and objectives both for the short term and long term. USGS is optimistic that congress will continue to fund this center in the future.

Invited Presentations

Laurie Davies Adams gave a presentation encouraging the committee to learn more about the importance of pollinators and how they provide outreach and conservation opportunities for wildlife conservation. She encouraged everyone to learn more at www.pollinator.org and that the organization wants to partner with committee members in any way that they can. Steve Buchman gave an overview of the National Academy of Sciences study on “Status of Pollinators in North America.” The report is available on-line at pollinators.org or the National Academy web site.

J. Waldon asked if the Committee would be willing to take on information management since the committee that previously undertook this function, the Technology and Data Utilization Committee (which oversaw the Automated Wildlife Data System), has been disbanded.

Keith Aune of the Wildlife Conservation Society gave an update on restoration efforts for bison in North America. See http://www.wcs.org/sw-our_mission/institute/ABS for additional information.

Tara Bergeron summarized the issues and opportunities synthesis of the state Wildlife Action Plans and reported that the draft report is now available. The report highlighted common threads and themes in all the SWAPs and highlighted common challenges and issues that cut across the country:

- a) habitat loss and alteration
- b) climate change
- c) invasive species
- d) data gaps/research
- e) monitoring
- f) information management

Next steps will be to take these broad challenges and determine what we can do to implement the plans. Unclear when the report will be final.

Roundtable topics (discussed briefly but deferred to fall meeting)

- 1) How to meet research needs?

Need to table this when there is time for more discussion. Create the next agenda and have committee members think about the following prior to the next meeting:

- a) What is the definition of research?
- b) How do you meet research needs in your agency?

c) What has been trend in your agency with research over the past 10 years? (is staffing/funding/other resources increasing or declining)

Suggestions:

Start with job description to help define research.

Consider including federal agencies and not just state agencies

2) Information Management

a. Ask directors the rationale for disbanding this committee?

b. Does Science and research committee want to take this issue on?

Comments:

Need to make sure information management is an explicit element in the fall workshop

Agencies need to be more willing to share information.

Motion, second and approval to adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 5:15 pm.



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Addendum: Regional Reports
Thursday March 27, 2008

MAFWA Update:

David Scott (OH) provided the report on behalf of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

- An attempt to address the Science & Research Committee's priorities was made at the 68th Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference held in Madison, Wisconsin in December 2007. The Midwest Research Supervisors Group was asked to discuss this topic and provide input; however, relatively poor attendance minimized the value of that approach. Thus, comments were gathered from the fisheries and wildlife chiefs for the State Wildlife Agencies in the Midwest on the current prioritization as well as their comments on all listed themes or any that might be missing. Comments were received from 5 states.
 - Three of the 5 states suggested that energy development effects on fish & wildlife should be included in the top 3 science and research priorities of this committee. Comments from several states suggested that development of comprehensive resource monitoring strategies, while important, should not be a top 3 priority but rather be included in all other priority issues as they are addressed.
 - Overall, there was strong support for keeping water allocation and quality challenges as well as invasive species prevention, control and eradication in the top tier of science and research themes.
 - One state suggested a higher priority for disease threats to fish and wildlife populations. Finally, 2 new science and research themes or issues were suggested for the list. One suggestion included the issue of recruitment and retention of hunters and anglers as well as addressing the issue of diversifying funding for wildlife programs. The other new topic centered on the impact of captive cervids and high-fence operations on the future of wildlife management.

NEAFWA Update:

John Major (NY) provided the report on behalf of the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

- Wildlife diseases continue to be an issue in the Northeast.
 - Chronic Wasting Disease is quiet in New York, with 28,000 deer tested and no new cases found since the initial discoveries in 2005, while West Virginia is continuing to detect new cases and has now detected 20 positive cases in the last 3 years.
 - Most states have been actively engaged in surveillance for Avian Influenza in cooperation with federal agencies, and response plans have been developed in the event that High Path AI is detected in North America (to date, it has not been found).
 - As most people are likely aware due to extensive media coverage, a mysterious die off of bats is occurring in New York. While the cause is unknown, bats are being observed with a fungal growth never seen before leading to the phenomenon being referred to as "White Nose Syndrome". Cases have also been found in Vermont and Massachusetts.
 - New York is currently recruiting for a wildlife veterinarian, a position similar to those added to Pennsylvania and Virginia wildlife agencies in recent years, partly in response to the growing demands of exotic wildlife diseases.
- Climate change is another issue receiving considerably increased attention in the Northeast, as projected shifts in snow cover and sea level would have significant impacts on wildlife, habitats, and infrastructure in heavily developed areas of the country. Alternative energy development, including wind turbines and biofuels have staff in several states identify information and needed research on movements, behavior, and migration routes to help mitigate impacts of project siting and agricultural land use changes.
- Several NEAFWA technical committees are engaged with habitat issues, especially the need for grasslands and early successional forest as habitats in decline in the Northeast.
- The Northeast Wildlife Damage Management Cooperative, a partnership involving Paul Curtis of Cornell University and Gary San Julian of Penn State University. The cooperative has been operating under the auspices of the Northeast Association for about 10 years, funded by an assessment of the member states in support of research, extension, and outreach. NEAFWA is in the process of developing a strategic plan for the next 5 years to guide the Cooperative's efforts. For further info, see the Cooperative's website at:
<http://wildlifecontrol.info/newdm/Pages/default.aspx>
- Finally, NEAFWA is developing candidate Regional Conservation Needs for 2009 projects to meet the needs of multiple states in the Northeast region. Funding is derived by each state contributing 3% of their State Wildlife Grant allocation to the pool. Topics currently being reviewed and ranked by the Fisheries and Wildlife administrators are:
 - RCN 1: Development of Instream Flow Standards, Guidelines and Policies

- RCN 2: Development of Model Guidelines for Assisting Local Planning Boards with Conservation of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their Key Habitats through Local Land Use Planning
- RCN 3: Identification of Regional Focal Areas and Corridors for the Conservation of Species of Great Conservation Need in the Northeast
- RCN 4: Development of Regional Indicators and Measures
- RCN 5: Development of Habitat Conservation Initiatives at a Landscape Scale
- RCN 6: Potential Impact of Climate Change on Northeast SGCN
- RCN 7: Regional Standards and Guidelines for Location and Operation of Wind Turbine Sites and Communication Towers
- RCN 8: Geospatial Condition Analysis Based On Northeast SGCN Habitat Map
- RCN 9: Enhance Conservation of SGCN Invertebrates By Developing an Online Database That Facilitates The Submission Of Data By The Scientific Community
- RCN 10: Identification of Factors Contributing to the Regional Decline of Populations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and the Development of Methodologies that Will Assist in the Identification of Such Factors
- Recommendations will be made to the Directors at the Northeast Conference at the end of April.

SEAFWA Update:

Karen Alexy (KY) provided the report on behalf of the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

- Discussions occurred around aquatic ecosystems and restoration difficulties; dam de-construction is a tangible and little-used method of stream/river restoration. There are over 25,000 dams listed as a significant or high hazard by the National Inventory of Dams. Discussed investing time and resources into efforts to study and implement dam de-construction, especially for old dams that pose a significant safety risk, could benefit humans and multiple SWAP species.
- Given the drastic nature of global amphibian declines and the complete lack of available information regarding amphibian translocation, discussions occurred concerning the need to support large-scale, long-term research to answer questions of feasibility and to begin to design regional protocols for translocation and/or repatriation. Since it is difficult for many specialist amphibians to re-colonize disturbed areas (e.g. reclaimed mine lands), these areas are in need of translocation efforts. Additionally, establishing new populations at these sites will ultimately serve to safeguard existing amphibian genetic diversity.
- There were discussions about state agencies becoming more proactive and involved in transportation planning to minimize impacts of roads to sensitive areas. Also discussed large-scale research needs to assess cost-efficient ways to incorporate wildlife passageways into new road designs.
- Climate change discussions have led to the decision to include a chapter in the 2010 SWAP update. National legislation is being closely monitored to determine the amount of support that may be available for states to address these impacts.
- Coordinated bird monitoring efforts are still being discussed and states are trying to implement this to the best of their ability. Also, research is being conducted and more is still needed to evaluate the response of bird populations to particular land management practices.
- Forestry Technical Committee wants to pursue more information and efforts concerning the regeneration project for Oaks in the East.
- Other topics of discussion included invasive species concerns, wildlife disease issues, and hunter recruitment.

WAFWA Update:

Russ Mason (NV) provided the report on behalf of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

- Cumulative impacts research with decision triggers is desperately needed, particularly for species of concern such as sage grouse.
- Research on the biological impacts of fragmentation, for example, through the uses of DNA marker technologies, will improve management decision making in urbanizing areas.
- WAFWA managers continue to express interest in the development of tools that predict likely pathways for invasive species invasions as well as those that estimate the invasive potential of exotic species. Member agencies are particularly interested in the tools being developed at the Fort Collins USGS Science Center and would appreciate updates on progress made in the development of these tools.
- Great Basin states are considering the development of a wildlife health initiative that could benefit Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and California. More and better data are needed to better understand the ecological and/or environmental triggers that facilitate/trigger disease transmission/expression. Research on the relative importance of trace elements such as selenium is also needed as is research concerning the potentially negative consequences of high nutritional plane diets such as alfalfa on the health of mule deer and pronghorn.
- Research into more efficient monitoring strategies for rangeland rehabilitation is increasingly critical. More frequent fires, larger burns, and higher fire intensities coupled with limited seed and funding limitations mandate that both state and federal agencies develop more cost effective and ecologically successful methodologies.