



ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

Agricultural Conservation Committee Report

Chair: Greg Johnson (KY)

Vice-Chair: Jim Leach (MN)

September 13, 2017

Snowbird Resort – Sandy, Utah

Committee Charge

The **Agricultural Conservation Committee** is charged with advancing administrative and legislative policies which create, enhance, and protect fish and wildlife habitat and expand recreational access on farm, ranch, and forest land. The Committee is also charged with helping document program and policy benefits and outcomes, as well as assessing the habitat risks and impacts from biomass production, food and fiber production, and urban expansion to inform Committee policy recommendations.

Meeting convened from 8:00am-12:00pm on Wednesday, September 13, 2017, chaired by Director Jim Leach (MN), with 33 people in attendance, including 25 committee members.

Scheduled Discussion Items

Speakers and Presentations

- Anne Gage, Northern Great Plains Program Manager for World Wildlife Fund, presented an update on WWF's Plowprint report, which tracks grassland conversion in North America, and the Great Plains region of the United States and Canada in particular. The slides for the presentation were sent out to the Committee following the meeting.
- Ed Boggess and Claire Beck, both with MAFWA, gave the Committee an update on MAFWA's Monarch conservation efforts, including an overview of the Mid-America Monarch Conservation Strategy, the Habitat Allocation Tool, and next steps. The slides for the presentation were sent out to the Committee following the meeting.

2018 Farm Bill update and discussion

- AFWA staff provided an update to the Committee on the 2018 Farm Bill, including Congressional activities, key issues, and timing. This also included a discussion on potential cost-savings in Farm Bill programs, and CRP especially. Staff then gave an

overview of AFWA activities in support of AFWA's full [2018 Farm Bill platform](#), including meetings with majority and minority staff on both Senate and House Agriculture Committees, as well as staff for other members of the Ag Committees to build support on the committees for AFWA's recommendations. A shortened, 2-page version of AFWA's 2018 Farm Bill priorities is also being developed to highlight top level priorities to give staff and state agencies a more shareable document for outreach and events. This document will be provided to ACC members and Farm Bill coordinators soon.

- The Committee heard from partner NGOs on outreach and advocacy activities. Partners who shared updates include: Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, National Wildlife Federation, National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, and Ruffed Grouse Society. Many of these NGOs have participated, or are planning to participate, in field tours, listening sessions, and individual meetings with Congressional members and staff.
- AFWA staff also provided an overview of coalition recommendations that AFWA has signed onto. These documents include TRCP's [Sportsmen's Priorities for Conservation and Access in the 2018 Farm Bill](#), the [Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition](#), and NABCI's [2017 State of the Birds report](#).
- The Committee then held a roundtable discussion of state outreach activities to give a better picture of what is going on around the country and to encourage more states to get involved, to the extent they can do so. Susan Rupp, AFWA's Bioenergy Liaison, also brought forward the idea of a white paper on the Energy Title, and is especially interested in gathering input from states on how to better incorporate wildlife into the Energy Title of the Farm Bill.

Federal Agency Updates

- Dave Walker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - o New Southwest Regional Director – coming from New Mexico BLM
 - o Partners for Fish and Wildlife developing 3rd generation of strategic plans.
 - o Species reviews
 - Lesser prairie chicken – received another petition to list the species. In process of completing a species status assessment. 12-month finding was due earlier this fall, hoping to publish the SSA as soon as possible.
 - Completed biological opinion on CRP and lesser prairie chicken – did not include CRP Grasslands, but working on conference report looking at CRP Grasslands in Kansas and LPC.
 - Monarch – listing decision required by June 2019. Webinar available online on FWS website. SSA effort includes state agency participation with MAFWA, NEAFWA, and WAFWA participants.
 - o Ed Christopher will be FWS lead on Farm Bill, Forestry, and Ag issues.

- Beverly Preston, Farm Service Agency
 - o The 24 million acre cap for CRP provided an interesting and challenging year for FSA.
 - o Currently about 23.5 million acres enrolled. 2.5 million expire September 2017.
 - o FSA kept a careful watch on continuous signup enrollment as the previous 2 years were historical high enrollment for continuous signup.
 - o Continuous signup was not accepted automatically – FY17 offers were batched to determine if they could be accepted. The first batch approved all offers submitted through May 3. No additional FY17 offers could be accepted.
 - o FY18 offers were accepted and could be approved. Beginning May 4, offers could be accepted for FY18 but could no longer be approved.
 - o CREP continues business as usual.
 - o No decisions on whether or not additional batch will be announced for FY18 offers submitted after May 3.
 - o FSA is still in a listening mode. Administrator and Deputy Administrator are still in an acting capacity.
 - o SIP was reduced on certain continuous signup practices, including SAFE.
 - o Soil Rental Rates were capped for continuous signup at \$300.
 - o A comprehensive review of all mid contract management activities was completed. States have been informed if their mid contract management activities were approved or not. Still working with a small number.
 - o Pollinator habitat practice extremely popular – FSA placed a 100 acre limit per farm on acres that could be enrolled.
 - o 4 new CREP's – MN, ND, PA, MT.
 - o First batching period for Tree Thinning Incentive was completed.
- Juan Hernandez, Natural Resources Conservation Service
 - o Slides from the NRCS update were emailed to the Committee with the meeting report.

Other Agenda Items

- Due to time constraints and travel schedules, the Committee will receive working group reports via email following the conference. AFWA staff will send a draft of the 2018 ACC Work Plan to the Committee for final review before submitting to the AFWA Executive Committee.

Action Items

- There were no action items for the AFWA Business Meeting.