



Strategic Plan

Preamble

This Strategic Plan (2020 to 2025) is, in many respects, very similar to previous iterations of the past decade. This was by design based on the initial feedback of the Executive Committee early in the planning process. One notable, new goal focuses on relevancy to the quality of life of all people; and, there is also greater emphasis on racial equity, inclusivity, and diversity given the civil unrest that surfaced during the writing of the plan. Likewise, the COVID-19 Pandemic descended upon the world during the planning process and it also emerges as an important consideration for the future work of the Association.

During the course of crafting this Strategic Plan, several definitional or presuppositional issues were raised with some frequency. Rather than defining or appending certain words or terms repeatedly, or as an afterthought in the plan itself, we have addressed them below.

Members

Our bylaws provide for a number of membership categories (each with different privileges and rights) including: states, provinces, and territories, federal agencies, regional associations, affiliated organizations, and contributing members.

That being noted, our primary reason to exist is to support the missions and mandates of our state, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agency members, including the District of Columbia. Indeed, it is only these agencies that are able to vote on the official actions of the Association during its Business Meetings including, but not limited to, budgets, resolutions, positions statements, and other motions. Providing them with legislative support, helping them secure funding, and creating a collective voice whenever needed is our main purpose. Even though we cannot bring the same level of consideration to legislative issues in Canada, opportunities for transborder collaboration are highly important to conservation delivery at a continental scale.

Coordination with our federal members, principally in the United States, with whom we share a great deal and with whom proper coordination is critical, is another big part of the membership picture. The Association provides the platform for this to happen on a national level.

We must continue to provide the quality professional services that member agencies, regional associations, and other partners rely on for their success.

Finally, the power of the Association to function as convener is reflected in how we provide a place for our NGO and industry members to collaborate with our state, provincial, and territorial agency members, adding value to all concerned.

North American Model

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation remains foundational for the Association's work and it undergirds much of what can be found in the Strategic Plan. The Public Trust Doctrine, one of the seven principles of the Model, is our benchmark for engagement with federal legislation, rulemaking, and policy.



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Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation

Sportsmen and women are vital to our nation's conservation ethic. We fully support R3 initiatives for hunting and fishing and embracing new outdoor recreationists. Every state, province, and territory has a unique mix of outdoor recreationists with differing views about wildlife. The Association needs to support them all to remain relevant and to honor our long-standing license purchasers. It is one of the great strengths of the Association that we are able to do both.

Science

Science has always been central to how state, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies manage wildlife and the new Strategic Plan reflects the Association's leadership role in promoting sound science in management. At the same time, many of our members wanted to be clear that science isn't the only tool in their decision-making toolbox. To a greater or lesser extent our members also use tribal and local knowledge and other social or cultural factors to make the best possible management decisions.

Resiliency and Relevancy: Two New Rs

When we started working on the next strategic plan, the world was a different place. We didn't know what COVID-19 was and we couldn't have anticipated the renewed, intense focus on social justice and equity. The impact these events are having on our Association is profound.

As we put the safety and health of our employees and customers first, our members pivoted to working remotely. The Responsible Recreation campaign, of which the Association is a founding partner, has become a mantra for safe hunting, fishing, and recreating during the pandemic and a wealth of data shows that fishing, hunting and outdoor recreation are more valued now than ever. With that said, it has become abundantly clear that we need to do more to keep the outdoors safe and welcoming for everyone.

Remarkably, before the current awakening to social justice, the Relevancy Roadmap had already paved the way for each of our members to engage in issues of social justice and relevancy in their own way. These two pandemics, COVID and inequity, if you will, have shown how incredibly resilient the Association is. If anything, we may be underestimating our ability to create meaningful change. The Association feels stronger and more relevant than ever, and the resiliency that is built into our DNA suggests confidence that will continue.

As we move forward in fish and wildlife conservation, we must embrace new users and ethics to ensure we remain relevant. However, as we embrace new users and ethics we must not lessen our relationships with hunters, anglers, and trappers upon which our Association was founded.



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I. MISSION

To advocate for the roles, responsibilities, and authorities of our member agencies to manage fish and wildlife as public trust resources for current and future generations.

II. VISION

Providing conservation leadership for a sustainable, publicly supported future for fish and wildlife.

III. VALUES

Community: We prioritize collegiality, cooperation, trust, and mutual support.

Inclusiveness: We foster a culture that welcomes diverse people and ideas.

Respect: We treat people with dignity, kindness, and fairness.

Integrity: We are honest, reliable, and ethical.

Collaboration: We work together to achieve shared goals and priorities.

Excellence: We commit ourselves to exemplary work.

GOAL 1. Advocate for funding, laws, regulations, and policies that fulfill the missions and capabilities of our members.

Objective 1.1 Build trust and credibility with lawmakers to increase visibility and support for member agencies' authorities and roles for managing fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

Objective 1.2 Advocate for member agencies' legislative priorities and funding needs.

Objective 1.3 Inform lawmakers on fish and wildlife conservation science and research funding levels needed to address emerging issues.

Objective 1.4 Strengthen the relationship between the Association and its members to better identify and advance shared priorities.

Objective 1.5 Build stronger relationships with federal agency partners to capitalize on our collective expertise and authorities.

Objective 1.6 Amplify member voices through robust relationships with conservation non-governmental organizations, private landowners, coalitions, hunting and fishing industries, and other new partners.



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GOAL 2. Increase participation, relevancy, diversity, and inclusiveness in fish and wildlife conservation and nature-based recreation.

Objective 2.1 Support members in implementing R3; elevate the national support and awareness of the importance of hunting, fishing and trapping to fish and wildlife conservation.

Objective 2.2 Foster partnerships that increase responsible participation in hunting, fishing, trapping, and nature-based recreation and garner support from broader and more diverse segments of the public.

Objective 2.3 Work with conservation law enforcement programs to build confidence that participating in fishing, hunting and nature-based recreation is safe.

Objective 2.4 Advance member efforts to engage broader and more diverse constituencies by enhancing marketing and social science skills.

Objective 2.5 Engage people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, including indigenous people, in the Association's work.

Objective 2.6 Promote greater inclusivity and diversity within member agencies through the Relevancy Roadmap and other tools.

Objective 2.7 Provide wildlife-based conservation education materials, training, and coordination that fosters an informed and involved citizenry who understands and actively participates in the stewardship and support of our natural resources.

GOAL 3. Provide leadership in developing fish and wildlife conservation science and its application in decision and policy making.

Objective 3.1 Leverage our role as the lead fish and wildlife convener to work with stakeholders and experts in developing science perspectives, programs, initiatives, and strategic focus areas that address member fish and wildlife conservation and science needs.

Objective 3.2 Enhance member coordination, capabilities, and expand networks of scientific experts, in part, through existing regional and national partner initiatives (e.g., National Fish Habitat Partnership, North American Bird Conservation Initiative).

Objective 3.3 Facilitate member effectiveness in using data, research, and expertise.

Objective 3.4 Advance our role in promoting science and research into fish and wildlife health and emerging threats.

Objective 3.5 Assist member agencies in the effective use of ecological science, social science, and tribal and local knowledge to advance fish and wildlife conservation.

Objective 3.6 Support member-generated applied research priorities that address scientific need, policy, and knowledge.



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Objective 3.7 Address ongoing and developing international fish and wildlife issues on sustainable use, trade, exotic species importation, and other issues impacting members.

Objective 3.8 Engage in discussions on philosophical, social, economic, moral and ethical dimensions of fish and wildlife conservation in the public arena.

GOAL 4. Attain comprehensive and dedicated funding for fish and wildlife conservation.

Objective 4.1 Increase levels of existing funding sources to support long-standing conservation grant programs and federal and member agency capacity.

Objective 4.2 Secure new funding sources that fund conservation for species and to address emerging fish and wildlife issues.

Objective 4.3 Promote partnerships that maximize the impacts of existing and future conservation dollars.

GOAL 5. Provide communication, training, and capacity-building to support member fish and wildlife agencies.

Objective 5.1 Provide legal strategy, consulting, and coordination services that address the complex issues members face.

Objective 5.2 Support effective conservation and public trust stewardship of fish and wildlife resources within AFWA member organizations through strategic communication.

Objective 5.3 Strengthen member engagement and the Association's support of members.

Objective 5.4 Provide professional development training and resources to our members and their professional staff.

GOAL 6. Improve fiscal and operational excellence of the Association.

Objective 6.1 Be resilient, efficient, and adaptive in the delivery of programs and services.

Objective 6.2 Optimize the ability of the Association's committee structure to make informed and timely decisions and recommendations.

Objective 6.3 Promote community and enhanced information sharing during crisis by providing resources, facilitating member sharing, and rapidly developing best practices.



Strategic Plan Addendum

The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Strategic Plan (2020-2025) Addendum was presented at the AFWA Executive Committee on March 27, 2024, and approved at the AFWA Business Meeting on March 29, 2024, during the 89th North American Wildlife & Natural Resources Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Background

In 2023, observing that a new Executive Director may be in place shortly after the current Strategic Plan (2020-2025) expires, it was decided to extend the existing Strategic Plan through 2027 to allow the incoming Executive Director to have ownership in the development of a new Strategic Plan at the beginning of their tenure. The current plan is widely viewed as sound, relevant, current, inclusive of our priorities and work, and how AFWA staff go about accomplishing that work. However, Association leadership felt it was important to assess the current plan and in doing so, consider some emerging priorities that may not be fully captured in the current plan and offer minor and appropriate updates. Thematically, those areas are Organizational Excellence, Values, One Health, and Tribal Engagement.

Updates:

Organizational Excellence and Learning Organizations

Over the past two years, the Association has committed to the concept of ensuring that AFWA is a vibrant and evolving organization, which we have come to recognize as a “learning organization.” Conceptually, we have embraced the vision of creating an organization that seeks to facilitate a culture of reflection, growth, curiosity, exploration, safety in taking risks, and learning. Additionally, the Association has invested in furthering its commitment to foster a broad and welcoming culture, which is an important aspect of cultivating a learning environment. Therefore, we recommend including the following addition:

Objective 6.4 Cultivate an organizational culture that values learning, reflection, curiosity, exploration and belonging within a safe and supportive environment.

Values

Another priority relates to our cultural values and is highlighted again under the proposed addition of Objective 6.4 (above), as well as the values and objectives under Goal 2. However, one area that we felt could benefit from additional emphasis is the Association’s role in helping states navigate their own relevancy and engagement journey.

Every state agency is navigating their own path at their own pace, considering their unique circumstances. The Association can offer a supportive role as a convener, creating room for dialog and discussion, and collecting resources for member agencies. Whether through discussion forums, BMPs or learning resources, AFWA can create a safe space for questions, exploration, and shared learning. In addition, with the development of a committee on Conservation Business Practices, the Association will

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be providing space to address complex agency business system challenges. Considering this important role, the following provision could be added to capture this concept:

Objective 5.5 Provide a forum for state fish and wildlife agency leaders and their staff to explore a variety of emerging issues including relevancy, engagement, business practices, and organizational effectiveness.

Further, this is a concept that we would recommend exploring in more detail in future visioning and strategic planning efforts.

One Health

The AFWA Directors in September adopted the final report of the *President's Task Force on One Health*. In doing so, Directors directed AFWA staff to incorporate One Health principles and considerations into the Association's strategic priorities, from Government Affairs to Science to Communications. With One Health becoming part of our fiber, we recommend the following two addendums:

Objective 3.4 Advance our role in promoting science and research into fish and wildlife health, and emerging threats, and One Health principles.

Objective 3.9 Actively and effectively engage in One Health as a leading collaborator in each of the four focal areas identified in the *President's Task Force on One Health* final report (September 2023).

Tribal Engagement

Another priority that has been evolving over the past two years relates to meaningful engagement of our tribal and indigenous partners. An important aspect of our engagement efforts has been the realization of the necessity to "go to where they are" if we are seeking their engagement. While Tribes and indigenous peoples are currently referenced in the Strategic Plan (i.e. Objective 3.5), two additional references could be considered for inclusion:

Objective 1.6 Amplify member voices through robust relationships with conservation non-governmental organizations, Tribes, and indigenous people, private landowners, coalitions, hunting and fishing industries, and other new partners.

Objective 2.5 Engage people with diverse cultures, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, in the Association's work including Tribes and indigenous people, by meeting tribal leaders and their staff within their communities, and at their meetings and gatherings, and creating open dialogue through shared cultural and learning experiences.