

## EDUCATION, OUTREACH AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Chair: Tony Wasley (NV)

Vice-Chair: Keith Warnke (WI)

Thursday, March 11, 2021

12:30 PM – 3:00 PM

86<sup>th</sup> North American Wildlife & Natural Resources Conference

Virtual Meeting

### **Introductions and Welcome- Tony Wasley (NV)**

Patty welcomed attendees and shared virtual meeting “housekeeping” notes.

Tony called the meeting to order, introduced himself, announced new vice chair, Keith Warnke, Wisconsin DNR, who introduced himself.

All attendees invited to introduce themselves in the chat.

This committee has seen incredible interest and growth in recent years. 2020 took us from meaningful steps to more significant leaps. There is a ripeness in the areas that this committee deals with – virtual learning, social justice and inequity. Issues such as these have taken center stage. Wildlife viewing and nature tourism – people are getting outside at unprecedented rates. Huge statistics showing people getting outdoors during the pandemic. Significant challenges and significant opportunities before us.

We’ve talked about whether the D&I group should be a subcommittee or standalone group. How do we simultaneously elevate the importance of these topics without people feeling like it’s that committee’s job (and not everyone’s job). President Parker Pauley has challenged every committee to look at what it is they do on a daily basis and look at it through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Tony invited anyone to make any additions or edits to the agenda. None needed.

### **Reports from EOD Subcommittee and Working Groups**

#### **• Project WILD- Johnnie Smith (TX)**

Johnnie Smith, Director of Outreach and Education at TPWD. We are in the process of locating a Subcommittee Chair. Johnnie shared provided update on Project WILD, including guide sales; online programming; discussions on DEI; EPA grant funding (10-20% of staff time). Zach Lowe also provided update on curriculum materials supplementary to Project WILD. Funded by MSCG, those materials will be available for free. Heard a report from MI Project WILD on adapting to covid. Robust roundtable on how states have been adapting to online learning and training.

- **Diversity & Inclusion- Jen Newmark (NV), David Buggs (TX)**

Jen Newmark, Co-Chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, Nevada Department of Wildlife. They just had their WG meeting directly before this meeting. It was well attended with lots of great engagement (over 100 participants). It is great to see the engagement we have now – the first meeting Jen and David had had about four people. Great to see the growth. They had a “Needs and Deeds” session where attendees could add notes about what they are working on in their states. Dave Chadwick gave an update on the “Safe Spaces” initiative at the National Wildlife Federation. Review of the Relevancy Roadmap and community of practice. Update from Richard Heilbrun at TPWD about urban outreach and meeting people where they are. Interagency DEI group shared report on their work. Update shared on Guiding Pillars and Practical Applications (aka Best Practices). They proposed monthly “coffee conversations” to talk about these practices and issues.

David Buggs, Co-Chair from Texas Parks and Wildlife, brought up the need for support from leadership. He has heard from some folks who feel like there is not support at the leadership issues for tackling these issues.

Bettina Fiery shared about the Management Assistance Team’s upcoming offering, The Power of Inclusion. She thanked the committee for their feedback on this series of workshops. MAT will be offering quarterly or bi-annual updates to hear how things have worked, what barriers there are, etc. This workshop is limited at 16 participants to help them understand their role in being more inclusive. The webinar takes place over two weeks with homework so that participants can reflect on how they can implement the things they have learned.

Tony reflected on similar comments (lack of leadership support) for relevancy issues. This challenge of having these courageous conversations is not unique to the DEI arena. It’s broadly evident in any area that requires change, e.g. in agency culture and relevancy. The America’s Wildlife Values Survey shows the discrepancy between agency culture compared to society’s culture. This applies in multiple areas, whether DEI or wildlife values. It is a challenge that manifests itself in a variety of arenas that impact our ability to be effective and relevant. The 2022 strategic priorities for the MSCG includes an item for implementing or expanded internal or external DEI efforts. We are making some steps. How do we make this a leap? Seeing the engagement in the D&I group, seeing the Relevancy Roadmap, seeing the strategic priorities, these are encouraging. We know some of these battles take a long time. The amount of change we’ve seen is encouraging. He is grateful to be in the room with the Executive Committee and President Sara Parker Pauley. These are conversations that are taking place at those tables. Tony extended his thanks to Jen and David for their work.

- **Education – Kellie Tharp (AZ), Tabbi Kinion (AR)**

Kellie Tharp, Education Branch Chief in AZ, co-chair with Tabbi Kinion, Education Division Chief in Arkansas. Kellie pointed out the advantage of the inclusivity of a virtual meeting – more people can attend. Great to virtually see other folks. The group gave an update on the MSCG project they are working on. RFP for revamping, streamlining, updating the Con Ed Strategy Toolkit.

Tabbi shared link to [Google doc](#) with resources that states shared about doing conservation education remotely. Some amazing things have happened around the country in the 12 months. Please share with

your staff and colleagues. That is one of the best things about this meeting – learning about what is going on around the country.

The ConEd WG hosted a conference on how to improve our skills to offer virtual education. We wanted to foster that community of learning from each other. Thought we might get 50-100 people. We had 315 people register for “the little conference that could.” We had two keynote speakers, a low budget. We ran through Zoom, maxed out capacity. We had people from across the country share about what they’ve been doing, what has worked, and what hasn’t.

Kellie Tharp and Tabbi have been working on the Ed. Working Group for many years and are excited to co-chair this group and invite others to be involved in this work.

- **Wildlife Viewing & Nature Tourism – Shelly Plante (TX)**

Shelly Plante, Nature Tourism Manager at TPWD, Chair of WVNT Working Group. Great meeting, amazing attendance due to virtual format (price more affordable; no travel required). The group discussed Birdability. Last fall we had Corina Newsome talk about race and outreach to diverse communities in that regard. This time we had Freya with Birdability talk about outreach to people of all abilities. Birdability.org has this amazing map with sites listed that contains information about accessibility. You can go in and add data on your sites about walkways, signage, other accessibility information. They are also becoming a clearinghouse for resources on wildlife viewing about making your facilities and programs more inclusive for people with disabilities. Freya shared some case studies and examples. They are a resources to providers to help people make spaces and practices more accessible.

Also shared about the upcoming WVNT Academy in 2022. February 21-25, 2022, in Tucson, AZ. The request for proposals is live now. [WVNTAcademy.com](http://WVNTAcademy.com). You can go submit a session to share about your project, marketing, human dimensions, etc. This is a great place to share!

They did receive a MSCG last year. This year they are working with Virginia Tech on a wildlife viewing survey. Surveying wildlife viewers in all four AFWA regions. 16 states will do a state oversample. Over 20,000 responses anticipated to understand wildlife viewers, how they like to communicate with, how they want to be involved in conservation, how they view and/or connect with the agency, etc. This will fill a gap for agencies to better understand this group.

They have a webinar series that will begin in April 2021, starting with wildlife viewing cams, then bat viewing programs, eBird, others. Everything on that is listed in the “Files” section for the WVNT meeting on Pathable.

Tony highlighted all the great work that is being done. He encouraged people to check out these resources being shared (e.g., links in the chat). Comforting and hopeful to see all these resources being created and shared.

- **Joint Working Group: Education, Outreach and Diversity and Wildlife Diversity and**

## **Conservation Funding Committees – Shelly Plante (TX)**

Shelly Plante, co-chair with Darren Readle. Everything they are talking about has to do with RAWA. Sean Saville shared a presentation, which he will share during this meeting as well. This group is trying to share materials to support those going to the Hill on behalf of RAWA. State Fact Sheets are helpful, but what else can we do? What makes a better argument, what do advocates need? Jen Mock Schaeffer said they are looking to stories that are compelling to fiscal conservatives. They discussed sharing examples of projects that agencies can start right now – no three-year planning process, no ramping up. Jen and Sean will provide list of priority states, then the group can list the projects for those states. Shelly pointed out that the EOD is very lightly represented in this group. The point was to have to storytellers, the outreach people, the education people, so they can work together to tell the stories to the public. They have monthly meetings and phone calls. If you are interested, it is the first Tuesday of every month. Please reach out if you can be involved! Email Shelly ([shelly.plante@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:shelly.plante@tpwd.texas.gov)) or Patty Allen ([pallen@fishwildlife.org](mailto:pallen@fishwildlife.org)). You can make the ones you can, and you can get the notes for the ones you can't.

Tony reflected on the Alliance reception yesterday – great to have the congress members and Collin and Jeff and Sara and Sean share some thoughts on RAWA. Reaching out to universities (who have lobbying staff) and governor's office to educate them about RAWA.

### **• Outreach – Jenifer Wisniewski (TN)**

Jen Wisniewski, Outreach Working Group Chair, Chief of Outreach and Communications at TWRA. Their group was very well attended too. She hopes when this is all over we can continue with a hybrid approach so people can continue to access these meetings and information in person and virtually. Alex Baer from IHEA shared about their work. The Relevancy Toolkit that the group has been working on. They have developed the messaging and toolkit, implemented phase 1 and 2. Effective campaigns (\$10K investment). CT was able to drive 26K people who had never visited the agency website to their website. What are the next steps for the relevancy toolkit? Focus this year on retaining all the people who got outdoors over the past 12 months. Angie Haywood in IN suggested to see how agencies have used the toolkit and survey them to see what pieces may be missing or if there is something else the group can do or offer to get the toolkit in front of more people. RBFF shared info on retaining anglers and boaters from last year in the upcoming year. Southwick also shared about data dashboards and fascinating return-on-investment numbers. When WSFR money is invested in stocking fish or habitat improvement – that has a return on investment for manufacturers for that many people buying your goods because that opportunity is there.

Tony thanked the chairs and co-chairs for reporting out. He reflected on how so much of this work is interrelated. Whether we are trying to understand the motivations of people participating in the outdoors, how to retain them, etc. – it all connects to relevancy.

## Life after the pandemic- Discussion for All

- What is the new normal? What are we doing differently?
- Silver linings?
- Lessons Learned?

Sometimes it's easier to look in the rearview mirror rather than out the windshield. If we can understand people's motivations, that will make it easier for us to maintain the momentum. Tony invited some discussion on this agenda item. What is the new normal? AFWA combined some silver linings early on in the pandemic. We're learning some new lessons now. Is this a conscious decision of people to return to nature? Is it subconscious? How do we help maintain this momentum?

David Buggs has been thinking about this. Now that we've got all these folks engaged in the outdoors, what happens when COVID is done? Conservation agencies traditionally aren't as good at education and advertising, they focus more on science. David has seen some commercials that are pretty good. Do we need to put more information out there on the value of sticking with it and what it does for generations to come? What can we all do together – not just something that NV is doing or TX is doing?

Jen shared that at the RBFF they talked about the health components of engaging in the outdoors. The four M's: mindfulness, meditation, movement, mastery of skill. Any activity that you can have with those four M's, all sorts of activities you can engage with through an agency. Share with people that this is good for them – motivation to take care of themselves. Humans are inherently looking out for their own needs (not always motivated by the conservation message).

Tony – what is our fundamental agreement on key messages to share about connecting to the outdoors?

David – it has to be segmented for different demographic groups. One size fits all does not work, but we still need to do something in concert.

Tony shared that they have had some leadership discussions about asking for data to help them understand who is turning to nature, what is driving them, who are these people? (Age, gender, location, income, etc.) We don't want to make assumptions and put all our eggs in one basket. We want to go about it intelligently to understand these individuals and what is driving them.

Jen – the couple of themed messages are really important. What is something we can all anchor onto, how can states adapt it to then make it relevant to their constituents? Keying in on the right messages, being intentional about who we are reaching. Building new partnerships – the health industry. People are selfish – looking out for their health. The first time they are out walking, they might not care about the birds they are seeing and hearing, but as time goes on, they might become interested. We need to start thinking about those partnerships with groups outside the conservation community and how we can do more together.

Michelle Doerr recently partnered with a licensed therapist around Do No Harm. Michelle is going to push back on the idea of "selfish" motivations for benefits of time spent outdoors. Attend her EcoWellness workshop tomorrow to learn more!

Kelly Reynolds shared about the OLE! Texas program that focuses on preventing childhood obesity by installing nature-play areas at early childhood centers and encouraging educators to take learning outdoors to increase children's opportunities to move and be active.

Tony shared about an interpretive center he visited in Missouri where they had a large pile of dirt with a tarp over it. He thought it was a construction area, but an employee at the center shared that was a place for the kids to play and to get their hands dirty. Sometimes kids from urban areas do not have much experience getting dirty and playing outdoors. One barrier can be parents who view getting dirty as a bad thing. Realizing where people are coming from and not taking things for granted is important for reaching people where they are.

### **#ResponsibleRecreation Campaign – Patty Allen (AFWA)**

Patty shared about the #ResponsibleRecreation campaign's goals and outreach. Both the organic and paid outreach had a good return on investment. 70K engagement for AFWA, which are great numbers! At the end of 2020, the campaign reached millions of people. Patty shared examples of social media posts. You can brand them and shared them on your own social media channels. We also created signs for state agencies to use – 9" x 12" for WMAs, state parks, trails, boat launches, etc. We mailed 100 signs in English and 10 in Spanish to all state fish and wildlife agencies. If your state agency is looking for more, we do have some funding to send you more. Project WILD hired a contractor to connect our activities to #ResponsibleRecreation. We also worked with MAT to share a free, on-demand webinar on #ResponsibleRecreation. Check out all the resources at <https://www.fishwildlife.org/responsible-recreation>.

Tony shared about #ResponsibleRecreation as a positive news story about the pandemic.

### **Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife Updates- Sean Saville (AFWA)**

- Bill Reintroduction and Next Steps

Sean with AFWA, Campaign Manager for the Alliance, shared an update about the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. Opportunities for outreach and collaboration. House bill introduction is imminent. We have been waiting for several weeks for the final text from House legislative counsel. Reps. Dingell and Fortenberry are ready to hit the ground running. It should pass through the committee, since it is similar to what passed through the committee in 2019. We are preparing a letter with 350 businesses and organizations that support the bill asking Members of Congress to sign on. We are exploring Senate leads. We look forward to securing bipartisan Senate leads. Senator Heinrich (NM) is involved and excited about this bill.

Partners are stepping up and engaging more diverse audiences with posts, webinars, briefings. The Alliance is leading the charge to bring more people into the campaign. Pheasants Forever, NWF, CSF, TWS, AFS, etc. are all stepping up and engaging. Outdoor recreation industry and Native American Fish and Wildlife Society also engaged and ready to maximize positive outcomes. Many more!

Texas Alliance created a video that will be made available to all via the Toolkit. #RecoverWildlife. Thanks to agencies that have invited the Alliance on and/or promoted RAWA on podcasts and webinars, interviews, press, etc.

Next steps – let's pull out all the stops! We are right at the cusp of getting this thing kicked off in the House and the Senate. See the updated talking points in the Toolkit. If you have any innovative, creative ideas, let Sean know. Continue to use #RecoverWildlife – social media engagement is at an all-time high. Reach out to Sean with any questions or ideas!

Tony asked about timing of legislation and government. What is the right time to get involved?

Sean – right after the bill is introduced is a good time to push. Then when we get to Senate-bill land, that will be another critical period. Now through July, first pres. Then summer recess period, then come back in the fall and push this thing across the finish line.

Thank you, Sean, for your flexibility and willingness to share.

Sean will share the link to the video. Please hold off on sharing until the bill is introduced, so we can do a coordinated social media push.

### **The future of BearWise- Dan Gibbs (TN)**

Tony introduced the conversation around BearWise and whether AFWA will adapt this program to provide national branding and information around living with bears. The question remains about sustainability and what this looks like financially if AFWA were to adopt this program in a similar fashion as Project WILD, for example.

Dan Gibbs with TWRA, one of the biggest things they talk about with this conversation is the cost. Biologists and I&E Specialists talk about the value, but then they don't have the authority to give the green light. It's hard to say what the cost will be. What the group proposed to the Executive Committee is that they would send a letter out to each state, outlining the BearWise program, including a one-pager about the benefits, invite them to attend a webinar that would be in May or June. This would be put on by the four BearWise committee members plus the folks who manage the BearWise website. Then AFWA will survey each state and see how much they would be willing to contribute, then provide that feedback to AFWA leadership. Hopefully AFWA will be able to make a final decision in September 2021 at the AFWA Annual Meeting. Every month their website gets more and more visitors. Lots of people from all over the country are visiting the website and downloading resources, asking questions, etc.

The EOD could provide support in administering the survey about the desire/willingness to participate. If the sustainability of the program is demonstrated and AFWA takes it on, the EOD would be involved in development and distribution of material.

Kelly asked about staffing needs for the program. Contract with Image Resources, Lavonne and Linda. Lavonne passes on questions that are state-specific. He doesn't know how much time she spends on it. Questions about downloading information from the store. They have Google analytics about who is accessing the resources. The business plan does not require significant staff time. A working group would help develop products. The primary need from AFWA would be the accounting aspect – the

quarterly bill for the website, handling the income from the store purchases. We want to make sure it's self-supporting either through sales from the store or from states.

### **Discussion: Goals of the EOD Committee 2021**

- What projects should we work on over the next year; possible multistate grant projects

A lot of great ideas have been thrown out via the working groups and committees. Jen Wisniewski brought up that Alex from IHEA is developing a new firearms course that should be ready in the fall. Opportunities to 5 million new firearm owners over the course of the last year, which she doesn't see slowing down any time soon. There is an opportunity for state agencies to promote that course to this new audience that we want to be relevant to. We promote the course, IHEA share the contact info, agency share about shooting agencies, etc. Opportunity to make those people constituents and/or agency supporters.

Alex – the RFP is live for a firearms fundamentals course. IHEA would like to work with other agencies to promote the opportunity. They are about to enter negotiations with vendors. At that point they'll have a little more information on what they can deliver and when. The idea is that we open this up to the states. One registration question they would like to include is "What state do you live in?" to grab those individuals and categorize them. About 30% of people taking Hunter Ed did not purchase the license. One reason might be for firearm safety. Looking for support from AFWA and the state agencies to drive people to the course and also taking individuals who come across the course and sharing info about the states with them.

IHEA working on a multi-state conservation grant about demographics of people taking Hunter Ed. We know the demographics are changing; the data to show that is coming.

Other ideas for projects:

From Tabbi Kinion – AGFC: Looking ahead - I think we'd like to pursue a grant to host an in-person/hybrid conservation education summit in 2023.

From Jerrie Lindsey – FWC: another - build on findings of wildlife viewers assessment to develop engagement strategies informed by findings

From Jen Newmark - NV Dept. of Wildlife: D&I have a potential collaboration with Dr. Manfredo, Dean Smith and others to guide efforts that will inform retention of underrepresented minorities in agencies.

Ideas on how best to prioritize and/or take next steps on these ideas?

Jen asked about the MSCG procedures. If we did all the items on the list for a grant – are we competing with each other? Do we need to prioritize?

This is a challenge with the MSCG – will a project fit with the R3 side or the sportfish side or the wildlife side? All three?

Silvana remarked you can go in as partners or compete with each other.

David talked about the priorities – lots of great ideas. What will move us further down the road? What can we collaborate on? We have these great projects, but there's only a small group of people able to

work on them. We also have day jobs. How can we decide what one or two things move a lot of areas forward? Can we bring in an outside partner that can help us?

Tony pointed out this is sage advice from David. Let's put our best foot forward collectively.

Thank you for the discussion and the engagement.

You can email Silvana with questions about the multistate conservation grant program at [syroschuk@fishwildlife.org](mailto:syroschuk@fishwildlife.org).

David suggested putting the ideas out in a list and let folks prioritize them 1-5.

### **Roundtable Wrap-up & Adjourn**

Thank you!

Shelly pointed out we may not have approved our minutes from last time. We may need to do that on our next meeting.

Patty asked people to fill out the polls for this meeting on Pathable.