****

**Wildlife Diversity Conservation and Funding Committee Report**

Chair: Sara Parker Pauley

Vice-chair: David Whitehurst

Meeting of March 29, 2018

North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference

Norfolk, VA

**Committee Charge** *Advocate for long-term dedicated funding and annual appropriations for the conservation of Species of Greatest Conservation Need, nature-based recreation and conservation education; support development, implementation and revision of State Wildlife Action Plans.*

**Participants** Sara Parker Pauley (MDOC), David Whitehurst (VDGIF), Naomi Edelson (NWF), Steve Klein (USFWS), Doyle Brown (MDOC), Caroline Murphy (TWS), Brian Nesvik (WGFD), Rick Jacobson (CDEEP), Paulette Nelson (NJDFW), Thomas Eason (FWC), Kipp Frohlich (FWC), Daren Riedle (KDWPT), Allison Fowler (ARGFC), John Chatel (USFS), Joe Burns (USFS), Chris Berens (KDWPT), Kristal Stoner (NGPC), Wendi Weber (USFWS), Jen Newmark (NDOW), Eric Gardner (WDFW), Richard Heilbrun (TPWD), Keith Norris (TWS), Taylor Schmitz (CSF), James Driscoll (AGFD), Josh Avey (AGFD), Davia Palmeri (ODFW), Ashley Green (UDWR), Bill Bates (UDWR), Mike Canning (UDWR), Bob Sargent (GDNR), Ken Elowe (USFWS), Mallory Martin (USFWS), Jimmy Bullock (RMS), Diana Craig (USFWS), Steve Beyer (MDNR), Ann Forstchen (FWC), Becky Gwynn (VDGIF), Elsa Haubold (USFWS), Barry Grand (USGS), Julia Peebles (BCHA), Monica Tomosy (USFS), Steve Hanser (USGS), Bob Ziehmer (Bass Pro Shops), Drue Winters (AFS), Jim Hodgson (USFWS), Mike Oetker (USFWS), Ed Boggess (MAFWA), John Kanter (NWF); Mark Humpert (AFWA)

**Scheduled Discussion Items**

Committee meeting convened at 8:04am.

Sara Parker Pauley-Carter Smith stepped down as the committee chair to work on the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act. I’m delighted to be here as the new chair of the committee. I would like everyone to introduce themselves.

David Whitehurst-I would like to remind everyone to please sign the sign-in sheet.

Sara Parker Pauley-We have a full agenda. Are there any questions or comments about the agenda?

David Whitehurst-It’s nice to see Wendy Weber here at the meeting.

Sara Parker Pauley-Is there a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting. Rick Jacobson offered a motion, Jen Newmark seconded. The motion passed.

**Recovering America’s Wildlife Act/Alliance for America’s Fish & Wildlife**

Taylor Schmitz-The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act now has forty co-sponsors. There was a House Natural Resources subcommittee hearing on February 15. We are working with House Natural Resources Committee leadership to get a full committee hearing. There is no companion bill in the Senate yet.

Bob Ziehmer-This is a big responsibility for state fish and wildlife agencies. Bass Pro Shops is proud to be part of this effort. Our industry is pleased the bill was introduced. We need the states to get behind the bill and we need their commissions to use their contacts to reach legislators. The more support or energy we have the better. Everyone wins with this bill. The return on investment will be high. This is the right decision for the future.

Taylor Schmitz-Please engage your legislatures, contact your federal representatives.

Richard Heilbrun-This summer Texas launched a task force to explain what we would do with the funding. We produced a report and are working with a Texas branch of the Alliance for America’s Fish and Wildlife. We are using a three step process.

David Whitehurst-Is the report on a website? Folks should take a look at the Texas report.

Bob Ziehmer-Missouri created a video to show how it would use money from a sales tax. Maybe we should consider taking a look at that again.

Kristal Stoner-In Nebraska roundtable helps to identify top issues. This group is already poised to be supportive. Maybe other states can replicate.

Sean Saville-Progress is being made. We’ve gone from 8 to 40 co-sponsors. We held a successful Fly-in. Member to CEO exchange was important. Bob Ziehmer provided expert witness at the subcommittee hearing. We are leveraging the support of members of Congress through outreach. We would appreciate anything you can do to help. We can build on the success of the Fly-in. There are now 50 members of the Alliance. There is a strategic opportunity to leverage commission support. Twenty-seven resolutions have now been passed. We have a 90 day window before the election cycle heats up. We need more support before we get to Memorial Day. We also need support in the Senate and need to continue to build the Alliance.

Kristal Stoner-Who is part of the Alliance? Is it those members on the letter?

Sean Saville-The letter does not include all members of the Alliance.

Kristal Stoner-What is the future of the letter? Is there a way for state organizations to join the Alliance? I’m surprised there are only 50 groups.

Sean Saville-That is only national organizations. The whole list would be several hundred.

Keith Norris-Is the list available? Can it be put on the website?

Sean-Yes we are working on putting it on the website.

Rick Jacobson-Many of us are doing what we think we can do. I’m not sure where we are relative to where others are. The more you can communicate to us the better.

Sean Saville-Connecticut is unique because you only have democrats. We are focused on republicans on the House Natural Resources Committee.

Richard Heilbrun-Can you identify the next couple of phases for the campaign?

Sean Saville-We want to get the bill out of committee. We don't need a markup in the subcommittee, we need to get a vote in the committee. We need to convince the chair we have support. We would like progress before Memorial Day. The floor vote is another ballgame. Maybe we could get there by the end of the year.

Richard Heilbrun-What should we be doing now?

Sean Saville-Do everything you can in the next 60 days.

Kristal Stoner-We should have key individuals reach out to members.

Caroline Murphy-We should also be thanking members for their support.

Davia Palmeri-How should we do that? We have been tweeting.

Sean Saville-Also send a letter from your Commission to show official support.

Caroline Murphy-Our Chapters have been using social media and email.

Naomi Edelson-We use social media, letters to editors. Caroline is right. We will be lucky if this is passed this year. We should be in for the long haul. A letter to editor tells other members of the delegation too. A thank you is very important.

Sean Saville-There is a domino effect. We want to maintain a 1:1 ratio for republicans and democrats.

Thomas Eason-What we are doing is not overt. We are working behind the scenes with a lobbyist. The oil and gas issue is touchy.

Sean Saville-I appreciate the work of Brian McManus.

Sara-This has been a good conversation. We should refine how we get the word out.

Sean Saville-We are constantly creating new content.

Jen Mock Schaeffer-There was a tremendous amount of interest after the bill was dropped. There are two motivated bill sponsors. There are great expectations and staff are responsive. We continue to work the issue. The Fly-in helped to seal the deal. We have 40 members now. Two republicans (Tipton and Duncan) will be added when Congress returns. Thompson sits on the Agriculture committee. There is a growing comfort level. There are co-sponsors people like to work with. The politics of who likes to work with whom is part of the process. We want a bipartisan bill. There was a good Fly-in conversation. The National Wildlife Federation is doing a Fly-in and having meetings back in the District. Members will be in their home District next week. AFWA can help with the “ask”. This has broad support and interest. We get to showcase what we do well. The offset is still an issue. Where there is a political will there is a way. Things are going very well. We appreciate Jeff Crane. There was a good hearing in the House. We appreciate Bob Ziehmer. It has paid off, we are off to the races. The more co-sponsors the better chance the bill will move. Talk to your members. What are the problems? Renewable energy has come up. It makes sense to put this in the bill. There are 435 members in the House. There are lots of people to talk to. High level discussions by CEOs in the Senate. I’m highly confident we will have a bill in April in the Senate. I’m working with multiple offices. We are having great success in the Senate. We will have a whole wave of support after the bill is introduced. Some legislative groundwork has been laid. Prevent emergency room for wildlife is a good selling point. There are high expectations that the bill will pass. This stands a good chance of passing. Everyone will benefit from this bill. The omnibus provides a glimmer of hope, will raise the budget cap. Increases to STWG and NAWCA and technical assistance for NRCS. Let’s build the wave and ride it. There is a legislative working group that Jeff Crane and Collin O’Mara co-chair. They are an incredible team.

Taylor Schmitz-We should make asks to the Congressional Sportsman’s Foundation (CSF) too at the state and federal level. This is a priority for the sportsman's caucus. We have direct access to nearly 300 members. CSF has hosted several breakfast briefings. Ten members of Congress turned out. Breakfast briefings at the state level are also held. It is helping that state caucuses are engaging their members. We need to thank Bob Ziehmer, John Morris and Governor Freudenthal.

David Whitehurst-I appreciate CSF’s offer to help at the state level. The state caucus could be a good pathway. Taylor can help with that.

Brian Nesvik-Is there a connection between RAWA and ESA?

Jen Mock Schaeffer-I think we need to keep them separate. RAWA is more bipartisan. ESA has divided people. We need to find ways to bring people together. There is a lot of angst around the ESA. I’m not seeing the same concerns around Recovering America's Wildlife Act. We have a lot of report language in the omnibus about the FWS working with states on ESA. It pulled language from the House report. Appropriators are tired of seeing ESA riders. I’m hoping we can do better as state and federal partners. RAWA is not a good fit with ESA. We think RAWA will be part of something else like infrastructure or WRDA. We don’t have any ESA bills in the mix.

Kristal Stoner-We get questions in Nebraska about LWCF. Are you hearing concerns about LWCF and is there a need to message on stateside LWCF?

Jen-We can provide talking points on LWCF. We need everyone to use the same messages. We hear about competition for funds and the Secretary’s priority for maintenance backlog. There is $6-12 billion going into treasury so there is plenty of money to do both. There is enough to pay for LWCF and maintenance. It makes sense to invest funds from extraction of non-renewables. We need both, LWCF and RAWA. Not everyone is saying that. The only way rural communities can build a playground is through LWCF. Not all state fish and wildlife agencies derive direct benefits from LWCF. The states need both. We can't do monitoring and surveillance with LWCF. Maintenance backlog is a huge economic driver. People go to National Parks for wildlife. These things work together.

Davia Palmeri-We met with a representative last week who supports funding the maintenance backlog.

Sara Park Pauley-We will send out talking points out on LWCF.

Naomi Edelson-The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act is our top legislative priority. NWF was on the Blue Ribbon Panel. There was a big investment by NWF, it’s an all-NWF effort. We are providing funding to affiliates in 18 states. Other states without funding are also helping. We will be making another investment later this year. Funding ranges from $5K-$10K per state. Regional offices are doing grass tops work. They are bringing this up in their other work. There is lots of interest in the Southwest and Great Lakes offices. The Rocky Mountain region has some important members. One part of this is to elevate the wildlife crisis. Many people don't understand the importance of the US in wildlife conservation or the significance of the loss. People think in general that wildlife is OK. They see turkey and deer and don’t understand there is a problem. We are releasing a report today on reversing America's wildlife crisis. Our legislative director said we need to articulate how important the funding is. There are problems with species of greatest conservation need. Not all of them are in trouble. We can't say 12,000 species are on the brink of extinction. This is a plug to do it differently in the future. Bill passage is a priority. We also see this bill as an opportunity to build a conservation army. We have a legislative plan. We asked activists to send a Valentine’s Day Card to their member. In March we did something with National Wildlife Week. In April we will release a sign-on letter. In our report, one third of species are at-risk. The message is that this is good for wildlife, taxpayers and business. We sent Valentine’s Day cards to each member of Congress and listed the number of constituents who signed on and said "be my co-sponsor". Drue Winters helped with this. It got the message across. We are thinking about the next Hill drop. Congresswoman Dingell, danced in the hallway with her monarch. We are ratcheting up social media. We had 800,000 social media impressions and 35,000 did some type of engagement. A total of 53,000 people contacted their member of Congress. A good chunk of members have heard about this from their constituents. We are doing op-eds, 66 letters to the editor. In South Dakota every major paper ran an op-ed. Five hundred groups have signed on to a letter stating the need.

Keith Norris-Is there a copy of the sign-on letter? Are there gaps in some states?

Naomi-Yes, we can pass around the letter. There are gaps. We would like to do an event in April. The report will be going out today.

David Whitehurst-It's great to see AFS and NWF helping with this.

Jen Newmark-There is a joint working group with the Education Outreach and Diversity (EOD) committee to work on RAWA. We have not gotten together in about a year. The purpose is to help with cross committee work. I asked the group if we should continue. The EOD committee believes it is a good idea to have a joint committee. We can develop content to get messaging out there. The Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations overlap. We can make sure the outreach and education piece is brought in. The wildlife viewing and tourism working group is planning a workshop at the AFWA annual mtg. We discussed how the committee can work with this working group. There is an interest in discussing SWAP revision and best practices. We want the feedback of this committee.

Mark Humpert-We should keep the working group linked to Sean and Bond Moroch. We need to address the issue of education and wildlife viewing in the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act.

Jen-Yes, this is something we should address.

David Whitehurst-We need to recalibrate the working group. I would like our members of the working group to bring Sean in and report to the chair what the purpose of the group is and if there is still a need.

**Blue Ribbon Panel Agency Relevancy Working Group**

Mark Humpert-The Blue Ribbon Panel’s report included a recommendation to form a relevancy working group. The last meeting of the group was in December. There have been discussions with others like Ann Forstchen and Elsa Haubold who would like to contribute to the working group.

Kipp Frohlich-Sponsorship at the North American is not inclusive. Florida is hosting the next AFWA meeting. Perhaps there is a need to expand participation to other groups.

Monica Tomosy-We did an exercise on the definition of relevancy. There were about ten definitions. What does relevancy mean to this group?

Joe Burns-It is an opportunity to broaden the tent.

Naomi Edelson-NWF is rethinking about how we engage people and tackle diversity. We hosted a women's wildlife conservation summit. We talked about barriers and leadership. There was lots of excitement. There was a woman’s workshop as part of this conference.

David Whitehurst-We need to use the right words when talking about relevancy.

Sara Park Pauley-Hearing multiple perspectives is impactful. We need more sessions on this topic.

Naomi Edelson-We are working on a toolkit on strengthening state fish and wildlife agencies. It will include a four pronged approach (elevate the wildlife crisis, building a coalition, secure great funding, inspire leadership and reach out to commissions, directors and wildlife diversity program managers about the need to include all citizens and all wildlife).

Caroline Murphy-What is the format of the toolkit?

Naomi Edelson-It will be available online. We took a lot of resources from Oregon and moved it online.

**Conservation without Conflict**

David Whitehurst-Wendy recently wrote an editorial.

Wendy Weber-Yes, it was on Conservation without Conflict. Mike Oetker, Ken Elowe and Jimmy Bullock helped. A coalition is coming together. It is about coming to landowners to find out what we can do to collaborate on conservation. We have a focus on at-risk species (listed, and ones where listing can be precluded). In the Northeast we focused work on species of greatest conservation need from State Wildlife Action Plans and ESA species. The New England Cottontail, was a candidate for listing and the states came together. We needed states and the private sector. We hope to replicate this model. Conservation is more sustained and there is greater buy-in when we work together. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program works with private landowners. Lots of great work has been done on behalf of the gopher tortoise. The Department of Defense has been a great partner. Their mission is military readiness. The Lynx is another great success story. The state of Maine pulled the right partners together. We would like to work with energy companies and other businesses with a stake in fish and wildlife. We would like to be more intentional and planned on at-risk species management. We would like to work collaboratively in an intentional and strategic way and better align with states and their work on State Wildlife Action Plans. It is important to work with states on important issues. Rick was a great partner with the New England Cottontail. If we align with states on species and habitats we can achieve more outside the regulatory realm. Where can we make population impacts? In the Northeast and Southeast, nine out of every 10 acres is privately owned. There are many partners already and I’m honored to be part of this effort. More information is available at [www.fws.gov/at-risk](http://www.fws.gov/at-risk).

Sara Parker Pauley-Is conservation without a conflict an initiative or principles.

Wendy Weber-It is a principle of how to work together. At-risk species is one of the focus areas. We are talking about the role of AFWA in working on these messages.

Jimmy Bullock-My company works on at-risk species. We are bought into this idea. I give Wendy a lot of credit. Nick Wiley, Gordon Meyer, Collin O'Mara have been engaged with us. We should start with collaboration.

Naomi Edelson-Is at-risk species a legal term. Is it an official term?

Wendy Weber-No. It's a term we came up with as a group.

Naomi Edelson-There is a watch list. Do we need to define?

John Kanter-I want to underscore the importance of State Wildlife Grants in getting New England Cottontail work started. The definition of at-risk species in the Southeast is related to the listing petition.

Wendy Weber-We can have communications folks help work on a common definition. Thanks for mentioning State Wildlife Grants. These were absolutely important. We started with New England Cottontail then expanded to early successional habitat. We brought in hunters interested in woodcocks.

**State & Tribal Wildlife Grants**

Mark Humpert-In the FY18 omnibus, the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant program received a $1 million increase over FY17 to $63.57 million. State competitive and tribal grants remain at last year’s level so the additional funding will go into state apportionments. The Administration had proposed a 15% cut to the program. The omnibus included language that formula, tribal and competitive State Wildlife Grants shall place the highest priority on candidate species. The directive could impact how some states use the funds. AFWA will be asking the states for examples of State Wildlife Grant funded projects targeted at candidate species. In FY19, the Administration is proposing to cut the program by 50%. AFWA is planning a Fly-in on April 13 and is supporting Dear Colleague Letters in the House and Senate. The House letter has closed and had 169 members sign-on, the most in recent memory. A senate letter is expected soon. A working group has formed to review ranking factors and criteria for competitive State Wildlife Grants. Recommendations are expected by the AFWA Annual meeting.

**Wildlife & Sport Fish Restoration Program Report**

Steve Klein-FY19 SWG funding is cut by 51% and grants are zeroed out. SWG is on the block. We have had SWG success. Wood Bison in Alaska disappeared 150 years ago. Alaska and the FWS worked together to bring them back. We reintroduced them in 2015, there have been three calving crops with a population of 175. We are on the right track, this is a good example of success. In Alaska we are learning where golden eagles nest and migrate. Without SWG funding we would know little about this critter. Competitive SWG in the Southeast is being used for gopher tortoises. Quail are increasing. The $1.3B for RAWA would be comparable to mandatory program funding. Nearly 100% of revised SWAPs have been approved. There have been several missteps with TRACS but we are back on track. By next summer or fall TRACS should be out and available again. It will help us tell the story. The SWG competitive NOFO was posted yesterday and will close on May 29th. We are looking forward to proposals.

**State Wildlife Action Plans**

Mark Humpert-A working group was formed to develop best practices for implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans. Best practices from the SWAP national meeting and a survey of SWAP coordinators are key sources of input for the document. An outline for the report has been developed.

Initial discussion have been held with the US Forest Service on updating an expired MOU with AFWA on State Wildlife Action Plans.

**Review & Revision of Land and Water Conservation Fund Principles**

David Whitehurst-In 2015, guiding principles were developed for LWCF reauthorization. SWG, NAWCA and other programs were included in those guiding principles. We want to revisit the principles since we are now working on RAWA. Jen is passing out a draft revision of the principles.

Jen Mock Schaeffer-AFWA’s position on LWCF is different now. In 2015 we were looking at creatively broadening the fund. I have a redline discussion draft. I am suggesting some strike-throughs and reorganization. This language will help us with RAWA. In the current political climate, it does not make sense to try and direct these funds to states for proactive conservation. For NAWCA most of the money is for easements. Congress can't differentiate. It would make sense to pull those recommendations out and go back to what it should be. In some places there are sensitivities. Wildlife should still be one of the purposes. We should keep Cooperative Endangered Species grants and Forest Legacy. There is an opportunity keep in outdoor recreation but we want more flexibility on LWCF. I struck out funding for wildlife programs and kept out what was there already. We need to take a fresh look at where we are today. This was drafted in the legislative and federal budget committee. Maybe we need a subgroup with this group.

Sara Parker Pauley-Does anyone want to help with this?

Caroline Murphy-When the Hill asks about LWCF, I use the Alliance talking points. Does adding wildlife as one of the purposes muddy the waters?

Jen Mock Schaeffer-Making wildlife one of the purposes does not muddy the waters. Making it the primary purpose would generate resistance.

David Whitehurst-Did you discuss this with the RAWA legislative team? I would be willing to serve on the working group. Secretary Zinke has an interest in maintenance backlog. Are they moving on this?

Jen Mock Schaeffer-There are bills out there. Not only NPS backlog but other agencies have backlogs (i.e. FWS, FS, BLM). Deferred maintenance backlogs are different than management. Hard to separate. We don’t want to neglect those. Restoration is an ongoing issue, some say no others yes on restoration.

David Whitehurst-It would be good to get Keith Norris on the subcommittee. Maybe people in this room could request that someone in their agency participate.

Kristal Stoner-Will check to see if someone from her agency would like to participate.

Jen Mock Schaeffer-I would like to wrap this up in a month. States that have parks want to help.

**Mid-America Monarch Plan**

Sara Parker Pauley-I was asked by Ed Boggess if he would have time on the agenda to discuss the Mid-America Monarch Plan.

Ed Boggess-I am retired as Minnesota’s Director and serve part-time as a liaison between the states and the Fish and Wildlife Service. We are using the conservation without conflict approach. Claire Beck is working fulltime on the strategy. There will be lots of things happening with monarchs in the coming months. An SSA is being conducted using four drivers. Mexico habitat and pesticides are outside FWS authority. Concerns for monarchs came to a head in 2014 when wintering monarchs dropped to one hectare. A directive was issued to begin pollinator policy work and the species was petitioned. There was also a resolution by AFWA and a joint memorandum. A national pollinator strategy came out. The FWS will make a decision on the listing petition by June 2019. A draft SSA will be sent out for comment in June. The FWS is developing a monarch conservation database which will open up in MAY. Conservation plans will feed into the evaluation and listing process. We are trying to be proactive and trying to avoid a regulatory outcome. I want to put out the regional plan before the SSA is done. The plan will be adaptive. States are taking the lead because this is mostly under state authority. All states have authority over habitat but not all have species management authority. At the last North American meeting, the states asked for guidance on how much conservation is needed to hit the goal. We didn't get targets but core areas were established. A National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant is being used by thirteen Midwest states and Arkansas and Texas. I visited with Northeast Directors last week since some core area is in the northeast. Western states formed a state technical team.

Claire Beck-Last year we kicked off development of the strategy. We came up with a proposal that was approved in March 2017 by the executive team. Many states have monarch/pollinator plans which can be building blocks for a regional plan. The document is designed to be in alignment with FWS policy. The overall goal is to leverage states and partners to plant 1.3 to 1.8 billion stems in Midwest and south-central agricultural lands. The MAFWA board adopted a strategy of planting 1.3 billion stems. No goals have been set in the south. Research and monitoring are important too. We will set up an adaptive management process. There are lots of challenges and opportunities. If you would like to review the draft strategy, send Clair an email.

**2019 Work Plan**

Sara Parker Pauley-Are there any specific ideas for the work plan?

David-I would ask that the committee think about their role in relevancy.

Kristal Stoner-More and more people are becoming involved in advocacy. Is it our committee’s role to make sure that communication is occurring?

Sara Park Pauley-Good comment. There is a role for this committee to communicate this need.

Caroline-Do people know about the toolkit. It’s a great resource. I can send a link.

Kristal Stoner-There are good products out there. We need folks to know about it.

Sara Parker Pauley-As amendments on RAWA come up there needs to be timely and effective communication.

Monica Tomosy-I was around during CARA. My recommendation is to do a risk assessment to see where the weakest link is. I’ve heard positives but have also heard some concerns. We should do an assessment.

Sara Parker Pauley-Great recommendation. We will take that forward.

David Whitehurst-I would like to commend the new chair for taking over the lead of this committee.

Sara Parker Pauley-We had a robust agenda, good comments and many questions.

Meeting was adjourned

**Action Items**

There were no action items.

**Progress and Opportunities**

Progress was made toward achievement of Goals 1, 2, 3 in the Association's Strategic Plan. This was accomplished by hearing updates and facilitating discussion on the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, State & Tribal Wildlife Grants program, Land and Water Conservation Fund and State Wildlife Actions.

**Threats and Emerging Issues Identified**

None identified.

**New Opportunities Identified**

None

**Submitted by**: Sara Parker Pauley