**Federal Aid Coordinators Working Group Report**

**To the**

**Trust Fund Committee, 03/30/2018**

1. **50 CFR 80 Revisions and CFR Review Scheduling Group**

From April - August 2016 a team consisting of WSFR and State members developed a schedule for a phased approach to rulemaking. The phases were designed to divide topics for review over four rounds of rulemakings. However, the CFR Review Scheduling Group did not address any content of the proposed regulatory revisions – only the timing of the reviews. In December 2017, WSFR published a proposed regulatory revision to 50 CFR 80 that included license certification and other matters described as “minor technical changes” (82 FR 59564).

**FACWG Concern/Request:**

The content of the proposed revisions came as a surprise to the FACWG, who had understood this initial round of revisions would only include license certification, as had been repeatedly conveyed by WSFR for nearly a year prior to publishing. Nearly a month after the initial publication in the Federal Register, clarification was provided regarding which elements of the posting WSFR was seeking final comment. This was posted on the Federal Aid Wiki site and in a letter from AFWA distributed via the communication procedure. The posting in the Federal Register raised many concerns within the FACWG and among FACs nationally:

* 1. The FACWG believes that many of the regulatory revisions proposed are more than “minor technical changes” and may have significant impacts to the administration of the WSFR Program in the States.
	2. While the FACWG recognizes the challenges WSFR faced when trying to post regulatory reviews in the Federal Register, WSFR should have been more proactive in explaining the content and intent of the forthcoming posting. To remedy this lack of communication, moving forward, the FACWG requests that WSFR actively engage with the CFR Review Scheduling Group and/or the FACWG to preliminarily discuss any additional proposed revisions to 50 CFR 80 and other regulatory reviews prior to publishing the content in the Federal Register. Doing so will increase transparency and strengthen the WSFR Partnership.
	3. Finally, the FACWG remains concerned with the potential for multiple comment periods or reviews occurring at the same time in the future. State agencies typically have only a few (or one) individuals responsible for these reviews and overlapping priorities lead to less thorough reviews and the potential of items of concern being overlooked.

**2018 FACWG Action Items**:

Continue to remain engaged and encourage our representative states to remain vigilant in watching for these notices – and to comment when appropriate.

1. **TRACS**

The TRACS Enhancement continues to dominate conversations among the FACWG and Federal Aid Coordinators across the country. As the performance reporting platform for WSFR-funded grant activities, TRACS will significantly impact the administration of the WSFR Program in all States. The timeline of the TRACS Enhancement roll-out will impact the administration of WSFR-funded grant activities over the next few years, particularly regarding submission of grants and subsequent reporting.

**TRACS Schedule Changes:**

The TRACS Enhancement Matrix was approved by the JTF with minor changes at their November 2017 meeting. The matrix will serve as the backbone for how projects will be built in the TRACS Enhancement. At the February 2018 TRACS WG Meeting, it was noted that the TRACS Development Team anticipates release of the TRACS Enhancement within a 12-18 month timeframe. In addition to the core functionality of TRACS, the TRACS WG is developing related modules that will also be included in the enhancement – including lands, facilities, and SWG Effectiveness Measures. The TRACS Enhancement schedule will impact the timing of the National Federal Aid Coordinators Meeting, but it is anticipated that this meeting will be held Fall 2019 (*See Item III below for additional information*).

**Comment Periods:**

Since the September 2017 report to the TFC, there have not been any commenting periods coordinated through the FACWG. However, the following TRACS related topics were disseminated through the communication procedure to State Directors and FACs through the WSFR Chiefs:

* TRACS MOU *(October, 2017)*; and
* Standard Performance Reporting Questions *(February, 2018)*.

**Subgroups:**

Given the complex nature of the development of a nationwide performance reporting system, the TRACS WG frequently forms temporary subgroups to address particularly complex elements. Since the September 2017 report to the TFC, the FACWG liaison continued participation in the Standard Performance Reporting Questions and the TRACS Matrix subgroups.

* During a December 2017 conference call and at the February 2018 TRACS WG Meeting, the FACWG Liaison co-presented the Standard Performance Reporting Questions comment and review discussion to the larger TRACS WG. These sessions produced the final list of questions recently distributed through the communication procedure by the WSFR Chiefs.

**FACWG Concern/Request:**

The FACWG has several concerns and recommendations regarding the TRACS Enhancement:

1. At the February 2018 TRACS WG Meeting, the topic of SWG Effectiveness Measures was presented with the intent of moving the topic to the JTF for approval at their April, 2018 Meeting. There were concerns raised by State members of the TRACS WG, that the SWG Effectiveness Measures were being rushed and not thoroughly vetted through the standard communications procedure. This topic is on the agenda for the April Meeting of the FACWG and WSFR Chiefs. The FACWG strongly recommends that this topic be fully reviewed by all relevant parties prior to inclusion in the TRACS Enhancement.
2. For additional modules in the TRACS Enhancement (lands, facilities, and SWG Effectiveness Measures), the FACWG requests that the various stakeholders for these modules engage with the FACWG to facilitate communication and increase transparency as part of the module development and review. Given that the responsibilities for TRACS data entry and management within States oftentimes fall solely on the FACs, these perspectives are of crucial importance to the acceptance and engagement in the TRACS Enhancement.
3. The FACWG recognizes that the purpose of TRACS is a WSFR-funded grant performance reporting platform. There is not, and should not be, any element of the grant submission or approval process tied to TRACS. States should be given the flexibility to enter grant information as agreed upon by the state and their WSFR Regional Office.
4. Currently, some Regions have fully transitioned to using TRACS for performance reporting which could present administrative difficulties during the roll-out. During the forthcoming transition from the current TRACS system to the TRACS Enhancement, the FACWG requests flexibility from the WSFR Regional Offices to ensure that elements of grant administration are not impacted by the transition between systems.

**2018 FACWG Action Items**:

Mike Sawyers (Region 5) will continue to serve as liaison between the TRACS WG and FACWG. He attended the TRACS Wireframes Workshop (October, 2017) and TRACS Working Group Meeting (February, 2018). As part of this continuing role, he will participate in subgroups focused on finalizing the TRACS Enhancement framework as necessary and continue to solicit input via the FACWG from FACs nationally.

The FACWG Liaison offered assistance to facilitate communications between FACs and the Wildlife Diversity Committees responsible for the development of the SWG Effectiveness Measures results chains (*see below concerns of the FACWG for additional information*).

1. **National Federal Aid Coordinators Meeting**

The application for a Multistate Conservation Grant for the National Federal Aid Coordinators meeting was approved. As noted in the TRACS Update (*Section II above*), the timeline for the TRACS Enhancement roll-out is anticipated for Fall 2019. The FACWG anticipates that the TRACS Enhancement will be a significant component of the National Meeting.

**FACWG Concern/Request:**

In previous TFC Reports, the FACWG has proposed that the date of the National Meeting be delayed until the TRACS Enhancement is fully functional. This proposal remains in effect and should be taken into consideration when scheduling the National Meeting.

During the February 2018 TRACS WG Meeting, it was proposed that the National Meeting not include formal training sessions, but provide forums for troubleshooting with the TRACS Enhancement. The FACWG supports this proposal, but also recognizes that this tentative proposal will require the TRACS Enhancement to be released and operational with enough time for States to begin utilizing the system. If the TRACS Enhancement cannot adhere to this proposed schedule, the FACWG may recommend further delay in the scheduling of the National Meeting.

**2018 FACWG Action Items**:

Coordination will continue with WMI, States, WSFR, and other relevant parties to initiate meeting planning and to draft an agenda based on the timeline of future TRACS developments.

1. **Freshwater/Saltwater Split Subgroup**

The 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation included a considerable change to the estimated proportions of freshwater and saltwater anglers. In many cases, these estimated proportions are used to allocate Sport Fish Restoration Act Funds in the States. Given the changes in the 2016 Survey, several States expressed concern to the FACWG regarding the proportions and the potential impact on their programs.

**FACWG Concern/Request:**

Upon initial review, it appears that the variation in methodology, sample size, and other factors may have significantly impacted the freshwater/saltwater split for some States. WSFR funding supports the National Survey. If results are not considered accurate, States may feel the need to sanction their own surveys, potentially using additional WSFR funding to get results the Program has already paid to produce. If there are real problems with the methodology for determining the freshwater/saltwater split in the National Survey, it raises concerns that other data generated in the survey may not be reliable.

**2018 FACWG Action Items**:

During the FACWG’s January 2018 Conference Call, the issue of the Freshwater/Saltwater split was discussed and the FACWG formed a subgroup to address the concerns raised by some Coastal States. In March 2018, the FACWG sent a preliminary survey to Coastal States to determine if there were widespread concerns with the 2016 Survey Freshwater/Saltwater splits, if any States had conducted their own surveys, and any implications for the allocation of their Sport Fish Restoration Act funds.

1. **Changes to Spring Meeting**

For the past two years, the Joint Meeting of the FACWG and WSFR Chiefs has taken place during the same week and location as the JTF meeting. The meeting had included a half day of overlap with all three groups that facilitated communication of current issues of importance to all parties. In February, 2018, it was determined that the JTF would meet separately from the FACWG and WSFR Regional Chiefs. While the entire FACWG will not be present, the JTF has proposed that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the FACWG attend the Spring JTF Meeting. In the explanation provided to the FACWG, WSFR believes that having the two leadership positions of the FACWG, in combination with the two WSFR Chiefs on the JTF, will be able to provide perspectives from the April Meeting of the FACWG and WSFR Chiefs to the JTF.

**FACWG Concern/Request:**

While the FACWG understands the budgetary constraints currently facing the WSFR Program, we believe the combined meeting with the JTF was an important opportunity to provide the perspective of FACs directly to the State Directors and WSFR Leadership that comprises the JTF.

The FACWG has two specific requests in regards to the change in the April Meeting:

1. Request that the FACWG Chair and Vice-Chair also be invited to the Fall JTF Meetings to further facilitate communication between the groups – particularly because two WSFR Chiefs have full membership of the JTF.
2. If WSFR intends to continue this separate meeting structure in future years, it is essential that travel funding be made available to the FACWG Chair and Vice-Chair for the JTF meetings. For many States, it is not possible to finance travel for these meetings without financial assistance. Without the ability to attend these meetings, the FACWG has concerns that the perspective of the Federal Aid Coordinators, who deal with the day-to-day administration of these programs, will be lost.
3. **CAHSS Technical Advisory Committee**

Andrea Crews (Region 2) volunteered to serve as the FACWG representative on the Technical Advisory Committee to the Council to Advance Hunting and Shooting Sports (CAHSS). The group meets annually via conference call to review the CAHSS report and recommend any changes.

**2018 FACWG Action Items**: The FACWG representative on the CAHSS Technical Advisory Committee will continue review and respond to requests as appropriate to provide the perspective of the FACWG. While this may be an intermittent task, the FACWG believes it is important to continue participation in this group moving forward.

1. **5yr Report**

The JTF recommended a pause in the development of the 5-year report until such time as the TRACS Enhancement is solidified and the WSFR Strategic Communications Plan is completed. The 5-year Report Editorial Team has discussed intermittent meetings beginning again in Fall 2018, but no specific details are available at this time.

**2018 FACWG Action Items**:

Sheila Cameron (Regions 1, 7 & 8) will remain active on this group when additional actions are required and solicit input from the FACWG or States as appropriate.

1. **State Needs Document**

The State Needs Document was approved by the TFC with minor edits at their September 2017 meeting. The FACWG thanks the TFC for the approval, guidance, and contributions to this effort and hopes the document will serve as a blueprint to further strengthen the WSFR Partnership.

**FACWG Request:**

When appropriate, the FACWG welcomes the opportunity to engage in similar reviews and updates to existing documents or procedures that impact the day-to-day administration of the Federal Aid Program in the States.

1. **Communication**

The communication strategy for relaying high level information from WSFR to the States continues to facilitate communication and increase transparency. The Federal Aid Coordinators Working Group (FACWG) strongly supports the continued use of this communication strategy for all WSFR-related policy level communications.

The FACWG has continued to facilitate the flow of information between various groups by:

1. Holding regular FACWG conference calls – at least quarterly or more frequently as dictated by matters of importance to Federal Aid Coordinators (FACs).
2. Disseminating FACWG reports and meeting minutes to the regions and State agency counterparts.
3. Continuing liaison roles to various WSFR-related working groups including:
4. 5-year Report Editorial Team – Sheila Cameron (Regions 1, 7 & 8);
5. TRACS Working Group – Mike Sawyers (Region 5);
6. CFR Revision Schedule Group – Doyle Brown (Region 3); and
7. CAHSS Technical Advisory Committee – Andrea Crews (Region 2).

**FACWG Concern/Request:**

While the communication strategy has been successful in several instances, inconsistencies have been found in certain cases which create confusion (e.g. 50 CFR 80 revisions posted in the Federal Register, information/updates posted on the Federal Aid Wiki, etc.) Applying the communication strategy, as adopted by the JTF, to all high level information aspects of the WSFR Program will improve the exchange of information that has direct impacts on the WSFR Partnership.

**2018 FACWG Action Items**:

The FACWG will continue to facilitate the communication of important matters to their respective FAC counterparts through continued participation in other working groups and engagement with WSFR staff.

1. **Other Matters**

Several Regions selected the next State representatives to the FACWG. These new representatives have already become actively engaged in the FACWG.

New FACWG Representatives:

Region 2: Tammy Brooks (TX)

Region 3: Julie Kempf (IN)

Region 4: Matt Thomas (GA)

Regions 1,7,8: John Seabourne (OR)