



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

HUMAN DIMENSIONS / SOCIAL SCIENCE WORKING GROUP
Chair: Ann Forstchen (FL)

Wednesday, September 8, 2021

TIME: 10:30 am to 12:30 pm NOTE: meeting is in Eastern Time
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting

Note: to attend this meeting, you must be registered for the conference

Committee Charge: 1) provide a forum for discussion of human dimensions and social science research and applications in state, federal and provincial wildlife and natural resources agencies and partners. 2) advise the membership and leadership of the Association regarding human dimensions and social science research and applications

Agenda

- 10:30 – 10:35** Call to Order, Welcome, Review Agenda – Eric Sutton and Ann Forstchen, FWC
- 10:35 – 12:05** Report out and discussion on inquiry of state and federal agency social scientists – Mike Quartuch (CO P&W), Natalie Sexton (USFWS), Chelsea Crandall and Ann Forstchen (FWC)
- 12:05 – 12:15** DJ Case project updates – Cindy Longmire, DJCase
- 12:15 – 12:25** Human Dimensions Story Map – Faren Wolter, SDGFP
- 12:25 – 12:30** Summary of Action Items and Wrap-Up – Ann Forstchen, FWC
- 12:30** Adjourn

The [**Conservation Social Sciences Community Network**](#) connects and supports practitioners, researchers, and advocates of the human dimensions and social sciences at state, federal, and tribal agencies and universities, nonprofits, and private organizations, worldwide.

Notes from meeting

Social Scientist Survey overview and Discussion.- key take aways

Purpose of the survey:

1. Describe social science capacity in state and federal conservation agencies
2. ID constraint associated with integrating social science in wildlife management
3. To examine support that social scientists receive and the extent to which they collaborate outside their agency.
4. ID future conservation challenges (and how) social scientists can help address them.
5. To describe weather social scientist are engaging in DEI efforts and if they feel adequately trained to do so.

In order to address these objectives we developed a questionnaire which was sent via email to 67 state, federal, and other conservation social scientists in May 2021.

Key results:

Overall, respondents were highly educated. 56% had a PhD; 42% Master's degree. So it makes sense that

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- ...the majority (74%) obtained their experience by completing a graduate degree in a social science field.
 - About half (47%) indicated taking several social science courses in graduate school but it's also important to note that ...
 - ...another 45% received informal, on the job training.

Overwhelmingly...

- Understanding stakeholder needs, attitudes, values, etc. at (86%)
- Organizational social science capacity building at (33%)
- Conflict management (e.g., human/wildlife; recreation users)
- Understanding and influencing conservation behaviors (31%)

We found that...

- Slightly more than two-thirds (67%) of respondents spend **most of their time** leading comprehensive social science research studies.
 - More than half (55%) spend their time evaluating programs or strategies and about half (47%) develop or assist staff with specific questionnaires/polls.
 - Few respondents (8%) spend time working with under-served/non-traditional constituencies and even less (about 4%) facilitate public meetings/town halls

The majority (82%) of respondents indicated that their agency conducts social science using at least one full-time HD/SS staff member – which makes sense seeing as we sent this questionnaire to these individuals BUT

- More than half (59%) also indicated that their agency contracts with academia to address HD needs.
- Importantly, about 47% indicated that their agency relies on staff who **DO NOT** have formal HD/SS training for some of their needs.

Agencies/organizations are not overly successful at integrating social science into decision making with less than one quarter indicating they're agency/organization is moderately successful and only 9% saying very successful.

We asked if respondents are currently assisting their agency/organization with DEI efforts and more than half (52%) said YES. Of these individuals, most or (62%) believe they have the skillset/training to do so

A few big picture takeaways from the survey that we found important but please keep in mind that we did NOT highlight all of the survey questions and results in this presentation.

- First, respondents were highly educated, had a range of training/expertise and focus on a wide range of topics using different disciplines to address them.
- Second, there was individual-level support for respondents in terms of agencies/orgs trusting them to do their job well, but very limited support in terms of having other social scientists to work with and having funding to do one's job. The former is what we often call the N of 1 problem, in that there is typically only 1 conservation social science professional in an agency. Additionally, respondents also felt like their perspectives were rarely incorporated into decision making.
- Third, Overall, very few respondents indicated that their agency/organization is successful at integrating social science into decision making
- Conservation social scientist face a lot of barriers when integrating their work into agency decision making. Specifically, capacity barriers were the most substantive roadblocks for nearly all respondents.

Next steps:

Some of our next steps in terms of communicating these findings with others – To this end we will be continuing to analyze these data across state – fed – and other conservation organizations; we intend to present them at regional meetings like WAFWA and with other HD groups like The Wildlife Society HDs Working Group. We also intend to summarize findings for survey respondents and others interested (could be 2-page fact sheets for executive staff.) We will be summarizing these empirical data in a commentary-type of manuscript for either The Wildlife Professional or Journal of Wildlife Management. But perhaps most importantly, we want these to be meaningful and actionable – publications can be helpful but we really want groups like this to use these findings as a means of acting upon the challenges and opportunities they pose.

During the breakout sessions we asked each group to reflect on the following 3 questions and offer solutions for improvement – key take aways from these sessions include:

- Integrate social science in small ways (not just on big contentious issues) and capture those successes or "small victories."
- Promote social science with traditional constituents
- Share social science success stories (not something that was discussed but hearing this over and over makes me think about a few things that I'd like to talk to all of you about - primarily under the umbrella of science communication/training).
 - Both for practitioners AND for senior leaders/decision makers
- Create social science network outside of AFWA framework
- Do a survey to identify conservation social science needs (I also heard - in Adam's astute comment - that it would be amazing to survey non-soc scientists [e.g., fisheries/terrestrial bios] to identify how much they think their work is actually integrated into decision making)
- Timing of social science efforts need to be adequately planned out because many SS's are very busy. Creating BMPs for integrating social science would help at the outset
- Find social science champions in agency leadership and develop approaches to increase THEIR ss literacy
- Social science reading group
- Develop actions to elevate social science to be equal and just as important as ecological science

- Develop/capture case studies of successful social science BMP applications
- Continue to promote the value of social science up through AFWA committee structure, specifically, the Science and Research Committee
- Promote social science as a stand-alone AFWA Strategic Priority for the purposes of MSCG

Cindy Longmire – updates from DJCase & Associates

Cindy provided updates on DJCase's work with Missouri Department of Conservation on their quarterly surveys of the general public to inform their strategic planning, policy and decision-making discussions and on a focus group project for MAFWA about diversity in small game hunting

Faren Wolter of South Dakota provided an overview of a storyboard project – a new way to visually display and connect social science work they have done over the past 20 years.