**Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Committee**

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Description automatically generated**Chair:** David Golden (NJ)

**Vice-Chair:** Thomas Eason (FL)

**Date:** January 21, 2022

**Time:** 11am-12:30 pm EST

Virtual

**Agenda**

1. Welcome & brief introductions (Thomas Eason)
2. AFWA updates (Kerry Wixted)
   1. Recently, the committee has been heavily involved with work on the illegal turtle trade. A workshop in conjunction with Northeast PARC (NE PARC) and others is being planned for mid-February. Registration just closed and around 185 participants have signed up so far. We will continue with discussions through the March North American meeting in hopes of assembling an AFWA resolution for review. The resolution will be sent to the AFWA Resolutions Committee in the summer.
   2. Per the September meeting, we also have been working to form a state Bsal Working Group. A poll to pick a date to meet was sent out today, and we hope to meet within the next month to define working group goals and actions. If you are interested in joining, please contact Kerry Wixted ([kwixted@fishwildlife.org](mailto:kwixted@fishwildlife.org)).
   3. Finally, we have been working with the CITES Technical Working Group to provide information on various herp species.
      1. In the fall, thanks to several states, we sent data in on *Phrynosoma* and *Crotalus horridus*.
      2. The CITES Technical Work Group will have a virtual meeting on Feb 23rd to discuss potential listing/uplisting of turtle species with the next CITES review scheduled for the fall. All of the wildlife chiefs have been invited, and we are looking to see if state biologists can attend, too.
3. [Partners in Amphibian & Reptile Conservation (PARC)](https://parcplace.org/) updates (Michelle Christman)
   1. Reviewed PARC
   2. Currently working on [National Disease Task Team (DTT)](https://parcplace.org/resources/parc-disease-task-team/) webinar series on herpetofaunal diseases. The first webinar was in December 2021 and can be found [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgXf4PqyXJc). The next webinar will likely focus on Biosecurity and might consist of several mini webinars.
   3. Also working on a federal Bsal Working Group to work alongside the state group.
   4. In the midst of planning [Amphibian Week](https://parcplace.org/species/amphibian-week-2021/) which is an outreach week focused on amphibians during the first week of May. If anyone is interested in helping out, we are always looking for new members. Please contact Michelle Christman ([michelle\_christman@fws.gov](mailto:michelle_christman@fws.gov)).
   5. Finally, we have been involved in discussions with iNaturalist and NatureServe on data sensitivity relating to herps. Currently, they will likely be working on a state by state basis for restricting locality data.
4. Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (RAWA) updates & discussion (Thomas Eason & Kerry Wixted)

Another milestone was reached for the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act yesterday as the House Natural Resources Committee passed RAWA by a **29-15 vote**. Fifteen amendments were offered, and the following three were adopted:

* An amendment that ensures that the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Alaska Statehood Act are not impacted.
* A 3% cap on administrative costs to the Department of Interior
* A 0.5% set aside for the office of the inspector general to be used for oversight

Although the bill could move to a vote by the full House, more work is needed to identify an offset for the House bill. Although differences of opinion were voiced over the reform of the Endangered Species Act and NEPA, the need for an offset, whether the Act should be permanent and mandatory, it was mostly positive mark-up. Members from both sides of the aisle repeatedly spoke to the importance of the legislation and the key role states play in conserving fish and wildlife. You can keep the momentum building by encouraging your members to sign on as co-sponsors.

* 1. *What sort of support could you use from AFWA and the committee to prepare for RAWA*?
     1. Some concern over match was expressed. AFWA has put together a match grant report [here](https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/9916/3708/9758/RAWA_Match_Report_Version_1-Final_Draft_Report.pdf).
     2. Brad O’Hanlon mentioned that this would be a good time to think about multistate projects and to identify interstate issues that we can work on together.
     3. Brian Zarate mentioned that the Northeast states are updating their list of Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need (RSGN) and that not all regions have these lists. For those that do, it would be good to look for overlaps to see what species might need multistate collaboration.
     4. JD Kleopfer mentioned that hiring staff would be a priority, particularly on projects to engage private landowners.
     5. Jeff Briggler brought up the idea of conducting large threat assessments and the use of easements for species conservation.
     6. RAWA funding also includes items for law enforcement, so this might be something to consider with illegal trade of turtles- funding for training and enforcement relating to herp collection.
     7. Both Thomas and Kerry mentioned that the committee is here to help with forming and supporting ideas, so please reach out.
  2. *Innovation grants- ~$100 million/yr.; what projects might be a priority*?
     1. Such grants shall be provided for the purpose of catalyzing innovation of techniques, tools, strategies, or collaborative partnerships that accelerate, expand, or replicate effective and measurable recovery efforts for species of greatest conservation need and species listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (15 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) and the habitats of such species.
     2. It was mentioned that these grants would be similar to competitive state wildlife grants (CSWGs).
     3. Greg Lipps said this would be a good avenue to work on getting species off the Endangered Species Act list.

1. State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs)
   1. *As SWAP revisions begin, what support could you use from AFWA and the committee?* 
      1. Florida has completed their SWAP revisions.
      2. Arizona is almost finished with revisions.
   2. *Would there be interest in creating voluntary guidelines for herp conservation?*
      1. There was not interest in pursuing this any further.
2. [CCAST’s Non-Native Aquatic Species Community of Practice](https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=01245fcb9dec43938996e18b53f0f142): Coordination to Address the Threat of American Bullfrogs in the West by Matt Grabau, PhD; At-Risk Species Coordinator U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Science Applications ([matthew\_grabau@fws.gov](mailto:matthew_grabau@fws.gov) )

* Matt introduced CCAST project and rationale for the Community of Practice (CoP).
* As new case studies are developed, they will automatically show up in this list: [CCAST Invasive Species Case Studies](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/EXSCCKry80T8kBjhMDDix?domain=usbr.maps.arcgis.com)
* CCAST YouTube Channel with recordings of all webinars: [Recordings of Previous Webinars](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/-OpvCL9zZLTN2mJFq5tln?domain=youtube.com)
* On a higher level, here are the links to [Collaborative Conservation and Adaptation Strategy Toolbox (CCAST)](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/ttvQCM8AZMIxYRQIJD9Uv?domain=arcgis.com) storymap and the [CCAST Dashboard with all Available Case Studies](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/2nd2CNkBONsVpE2tRPTgG?domain=usbr.maps.arcgis.com)
* [2021 Green Sunfish and American Bullfrog Workshop Report](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/Fd6HCOYDgOs5k06fPd4zo?domain=lccnetwork.org)
* Currently planning a 2022 Bullfrog workshop.
* Please contact Matt (email above) if interested in joining in the CoP. A webinar will be held on February 15, 2022.
* Greg Lipps- In OH, while bullfrogs are native, there is some evidence that suggests they are outcompeting other species and are also transmitting disease. In addition, Ohio now allows aquaculture facilities to sell bullfrogs.
* Tom Jones- In AZ, the CoP has been very helpful to assist with bullfrog management and also for funding.

1. State Roundtable

* Brad O’Hanlon- In FL, we are monitoring turtle bunyavirus. Currently, this is the high season for reports, and we will be focusing on monitoring the panhandle this year. Mike Van Nostrand has been charged, along with his company, Strictly Reptiles, Inc. with illegally harvesting and selling wild-caught freshwater turtles. Van Nostrand, if convicted, faces up to five years in prison and a $250,000 fine. His company, if convicted, faces a criminal fine of at least $500,000. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission approved a final rule to protect diamondback terrapins from wild collection and drowning in recreational blue crab traps by installing bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) by March 1, 2023. We will also be working on updating other herp regulations and will be speaking at the February Southeast PARC meeting.
* Jeff Briggler- In MO, we are continuing our hellbender propagation program with captive breeding. Around 1,000 are being released annually in various stages. SEAFWA recently sent a letter opposing listing of the alligator snapping turtle. Have been participating in the iNaturalist/NatureServe meetings. Currently working on sensitive species assessments for Illinois Chorus Frog, Blanding’s Turtle, and Western Chicken Turtle. We also have a new reptile book for Missouri.
* Carol Hall- In MN, several individuals (MN DNR/MN Zoo/UofM) recently participated in the first Midwest Wood Turtle Working Group meeting. Many of the participants are part of a C-SWG grant that includes Wood Turtle projects in IA, MI, MN, and WI. In 2022, the MN DNR will continue collecting eDNA samples to assess Wood Turtle presence in undocumented tributaries and river reaches. Records and data are being compiled for the Wood Turtle SSA. A Blanding's Turtle C-SWG project will continue in 2022 with efforts focusing on population assessment and monitoring. MN DNR staff also participated in the I-Naturalist/NatureServe meeting.
* Mike Ravesi- In CT, we have a new herp book available in Connecticut too: <https://www.ctdeepstore.com/Conservation-of-Amphibians-and-Reptiles-in-Connecticut-882.htm>. It includes management techniques and focuses on guild (multispecies) management.
* Daren Riedle- In KS, they are working on Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) and Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) for 14 aquatic species within the state. The purpose of this proposed CCAA/SHA is for the Service to join with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) and participating non-federal property owners to implement conservation measures for the 14 aquatic species. The proposed covered species are designated as “Species in Need of Conservation” by the State. Most of the species are fish and freshwater mussels, but the alligator snapping turtle is also part of the list.
* Greg Lipps- In OH, we are looking for additional states to consider working on a land recovery acquisition grant for eastern massasauga. Please reach out if interested.
* Kristin Wildman- In MI, we are working on public land acquisition and have a new wildlife action plan coordinator. Will be getting in touch with Greg

1. Wrap-up
   1. Next meeting @ [North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference](https://wildlifemanagement.institute/conference) on Thurs Mar 10 from 10-1:00 pm EST