

International Relations Committee - Report

Meeting of September 25, 2023
Ryan Brown (Virginia), Co-chair
Christie Curley (Ontario), Co-Chair

Meeting convened from 10:00am to 12:00pm. There were 57 people in attendance.

Upcoming meetings and opportunities:

- IUCN US National Committee Annual Meeting: October 3-4, 2023
- CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA): October 16-20, 2023
- CITES Standing Committee: November 6-10, 2023
- 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Climate Change Conference: November 30 – December 12, 2023
- Convention on Migratory Species Conference of the Parties: February 12-17, 2024
- CBD Conference of the Parties: October 2024
- IPBES: Sustainable Use, Values, and Invasive Species Assessments Released
- Ramsar 5th Strategic Plan development: Opportunity for Input

Committee Work Plan and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Work (Deb Hahn): The following actions emerged from the March meeting.

- Participate in the upcoming CITES meetings: The CITES Technical Work Group participated in the June CITES Animals Committee and will attend the November Standing Committee.
- Update the Charge to include DEI.: The Committee updated its charge to include “Increase the diversity of voices informing discussions, positions, and products.”
- Invite and welcome a diversity of voices to the next Committee meeting.: Dr. Leroy Littlebear shared his perspectives with the Committee at this meeting.
- Finalize power point guidance that ensures accessibility and inclusivity.: Worked with AFWA to develop guidelines.
- We also have discussed how we can make the meeting space more inclusive and haven’t found a way to address this with the seating arrangements.

Deb reviewed the draft work plan for 2023-2024. Committee members can send comments on the [draft work plan](#) to [Deb](#) by COB November 9th.

Dr. Leroy Littlebear: We were honored to engage with Dr. Leroy Littlebear who shared his knowledge about bison recover and about integrating traditional ecological knowledge and western science to inform policies and positions.

Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee Update (Marc Cattet): The Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee (CWDC) is composed of the wildlife directors and agency leads representing the jurisdictions and agencies (13 Provinces and Territories and Environment and Climate Change Canada, Parks Canada Agency, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada) with responsibility for wildlife conservation in Canada. The committee is one of five national committees that currently provide advice and support to the federal, provincial, and territorial senior government officials who are responsible for wildlife conservation and biodiversity. However, this Conservation, Wildlife and Biodiversity governance structure will likely change over this next year. Anticipated changes include a reduction in the number of national committees from five to three, and a broadening of the scope of the CWDC to encompass

additional elements such as invasive species and wildlife health.

The CWDC's work plan for 2023/2024 includes:

- 1) Continued collaboration to support the 2018 Pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation in Canada. This includes advancing multi-species and ecosystem-based approaches to better coordinate conservation action planning and implementation for priority places and sectors (agriculture, urban, forestry), and advancing initiatives towards conservation action planning for priority species.
- 2) Collaboration to develop a 2030 Biodiversity Strategy for Canada. This new initiative is to support Canada's adoption of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework, which occurred at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) at Montréal in December 2022.
- 3) Identifying opportunities, particularly at the provincial and territorial level, to engage with other sectors to improve our understanding and encourage collaboration under a One Health framework. This would include coordination with AFWA should the association prioritize leadership in the One Health space.

CITES Technical Work Group Update (Buddy Baker, Gordon Batcheller, Carolyn Caldwell, Stewart Liley): Buddy Baker presented on behalf of the CITES Technical Work Group (Team). He introduced Gordon Batcheller as the new NEAFWA CITES representative. Gordon has experience with CITES and will be an excellent addition to the Team. The Team met in person with the USFWS on April 5th. The meeting provided a chance to discuss issues and continue to build relationships and maintain a strong partnership. We continued to discuss the recent CITES turtle listings and how we can support implementation. The Team represented the state fish and wildlife agencies and where applicable the Provinces and Territories at the Animals Committee in June. See the Team's [report](#). The next CITES meeting will be the Standing Committee meeting on November 6 to 10. The Team is a member of the following Standing Committee working groups: Livelihoods, Labelling system for trade in caviar, Species at risk of extinction affected by international trade, Sharks and Rays, Role of CITES in reducing risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade, and Rapid movement of wildlife diagnostic samples and of musical instruments. The Team has participated in the Non-detriment Finding Working Group and is following the discussions closely. The Team worked with USFWS to help ensure furbearer and alligator tags were delivered in a timely manner. The USFWS did an excellent job working with the states and the vendor. Furbearer tags have been delivered to all states. Alligator tags will be delivered in November. The Team is interested in discussing how we might order tags a year in advance since some of the delays we experience are out of the USFWS and states' control.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, International Affairs Report (Don Morgan): Don Morgan shared the International Affairs Program Priorities, which include the following.

CITES Standing Committee: The U.S. is serving as the Chair of the Standing Committee and the North American Region representative through CoP20 (2025). Rose Gnam, IA's Division of Scientific Authority's Manager is performing the role of Chair.

Trilateral: The U.S. will be hosting the Trilateral in 2024, location and date TBD.

Elephant 4(d) Final Rule: IA is finalizing a rule to increase protection and conservation of African Elephant. Staff are reviewing the almost 140,000 public comments received to revise the draft rule. The purposes outlined in the proposed rule are threefold:

- To increase protection for African elephants in light of the recent rise in international trade of live African elephants by establishing ESA enhancement permit requirements for international trade in live elephants and specific enhancement requirements for the import of wild-sourced elephants, as well as requirements to ensure that proposed recipients of live African elephants are suitably equipped to house and care for them;
- To clarify the existing enhancement requirement during our evaluation of an application for a permit to import African elephant sport-hunted trophies;
- To incorporate a Party's designation under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) National Legislation Project into the decision-making process for the import of live African elephants, African elephant sport-hunted trophies, and African elephant parts and products other than ivory and sport-hunted trophies.

Big Cat Public Safety Act: IA is finalizing the interim rule, taking into account the public comments, and providing support to the Office of Law Enforcement for implementation. On June 12, 2023, the Service published an interim rule to implement the Big Cat Public Safety Act (BCPSA). While an interim rule went into effect upon publication, the Service still accepted public comments on the rulemaking through August 11, 2023. The Service is currently reviewing the public comments it received. The BCPSA makes it unlawful to import, export, transport, sell, receive, acquire, or purchase in interstate or foreign commerce, or in a manner substantially affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or breed or possess prohibited wildlife species (lions, tigers, leopards, snow leopards, clouded leopards, jaguars, cheetahs, and cougars, or any hybrids thereof), with certain exceptions. The BCPSA also requires an entity or individual who does not qualify for one of the other exceptions and is in possession of any prohibited wildlife species to register each such animal with the Service not later than June 18, 2023. This registration allowed owners to continue to possess their pre-BCPSA big cats.

Ramsar: The Service is currently conducting an internal review of how it administers the Ramsar program in the United States. The Service is exploring ways to increase engagement, focus, partnerships, and public knowledge of the US Ramsar program. The intent is to elevate what it means to be a Ramsar site in the United States and increase the conservation of wetlands.

Multinational Species Conservation Funds reauthorization: The Multinational Species Conservation funds are undergoing reauthorization through the WILD Act. These funds provide grants for conservation of Elephants, Rhinos, Tigers, Great Apes, and Sea Turtles and other turtles and tortoises.

Assistant Director Update: The position was open to applications from both government-wide and external candidates. The SES process takes time and requires multiple levels of review. Additionally, there are several vacancies within the Service's SES positions and therefore additional delays are expected. Elsa Haubold is currently acting as our Assistant Director until we are able to officially fill the position.

Connections with Canada: Priorities of the Trilateral Committee include climate change, diversity, and inclusion, integrating human dimensions, technology innovation for conservation and zoonotic disease. The Canadian Wildlife Service is a strong partner in this forum. **CITES Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) Working Group:** The U.S. is actively participating in the IPLCs CITES Standing Committee working group chaired by Canada focused on increasing indigenous and local community engagement in CITES processes.

CITES Updates:

- **Standing Committee:** The 77th meeting of the Standing Committee to CITES will be held November 6th- 10th, 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland. Priority topics include Compliance, Illegal Trade and Enforcement, and CITES and People. Proposals are currently being reviewed. The US delegation will include USFWS staff and Deb Hahn will represent state fish and wildlife agencies.
- **Animals and Plants Committee:** Intersessional Working Groups were formed at the July Committee meetings and have begun working.
- **A CITES Non-Detriment Findings Workshop** will be held from Dec. 4-8, 2023, in Nairobi Kenya. Registration will be limited to 150 participants.

FACE Updates (Tristan Breijer): Tristan shared some of activities of the [European Federation for Hunting and Conservation](#) (FACE). Established in 1977, FACE represents the interests of Europe's 7 million hunters as an international non-profit-making non-governmental organization. FACE has been a member of IUCN since 1987 and participates in various specialist groups. They have observer status to CITES, CMS, AEW and the Bern Convention. Sixteen staff sit in Brussels, working on Conservation and Wildlife, Legal and Public Affairs as well as Communications matters. FACE is the secretariat of the European Parliament's Intergroup on "Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside", supported by over 130 MEPs from different political groups. It promotes the role of hunting and sustainable use. In 2023, FACE developed the #SignForHunting Campaign and collected over 360,000 signatures to showcase the voice and concern of hunters. They were actively involved in high-level international conferences, policy advocacy with MEPs and Member States, and collaborative projects like LIFE WildWolf. They hosted many events in the European Institutions together with MEPs and other stakeholders on a range of issues, such as Wildlife Trafficking, Trapping, and Sustainable Hunting.

Social acceptance is vital for the continued practice of hunting and the precursor to participation. Gaining public support is crucial for the long-term sustainability of hunting. FACE aims to build this support by appealing to shared societal values, such as conservation and responsible resource management. FACE emphasizes that societal involvement is key to wildlife conservation, biodiversity preservation, and the economic benefits that sustainable hunting brings to local communities. We have set an ambitious goal to achieve a 70% social acceptance rate for hunting by 2027. This involves data collection through standardized surveys, awareness-raising campaigns, and educational initiatives aimed at changing the public discourse around hunting. FACE finalized a European election manifesto in September 2023, aimed at influencing and supporting political candidates standing for election as a Member of the European Parliament in 2024. Those who sign are committed to advancing the policy priorities of hunters at the European level. The European Union is the world's second-largest importer of hunting trophies after the USA. Currently many import bans are under consideration. FACE is actively monitoring these efforts and working together with local associations and policy makers to combat these restrictions on hunting.

Joint Topics for Discussion: Ramsar, CBD, CITES, CMS (All): There was not enough time to dive into all the topics so the Committee will hold a virtual meeting to discuss and gather input on issues and actions within Ramsar, CBD, CITES and CMS. Ramsar is developing its 5th strategic plan. Canada is co-chairing the Working Group. They finished the preliminary scoping, work planning, develop engagement and consultation phase. They are wrapping up phase 2 which included a consultation survey. Phase 3 includes plan development. The scientific body (SBSTTA) of CBD will be discussing several important issues related to implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework. They also will be looking at the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, including policy aspects of (IPBES) assessments (sustainable use, values, and invasive species) for advice and guidance on implementation. At the CITES meetings issues of interest include the role

of CITES in reducing risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade, cooperation with the IPBES sustainable use, engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities and Livelihoods, rapid movement of wildlife diagnostic samples and musical instruments, and identifying information on species at risk of extinction affected by international trade. The documents for the Convention on Migratory Species Conference of the Parties (CoP) are posted. They include discussions of the wild harvest of meat, the social and cultural aspects of animal behavior, climate change and migratory species, and more. The IR Committee will engage on these issues and more.

One Health (Paul Johansen): AFWA finalized a [One Health White Paper](#) in September 2022. AFWA then created a One Health Presidential Task Force to develop strategies to implement the white paper. The [Presidential Task Force report](#) was approved by AFWA. One aspect they are considering is how to utilize the International Relations Committee to identify and implement strategies for more effective and active engagement with the international community involved in One Health (e.g., those involved in the interplay of wildlife, public and ecosystem health). There are numerous international discussions and efforts around One Health, zoonotic diseases, and how they intersect with the work of CITES, CBD, IUCN etc. Having recommendations or priorities around One Health could be useful in these discussions. Once a One Health Committee is established the IR Committee will engage with them.

Bird Conservation Across the Americas (Lane Nothman): The Audubon Society is engaged in implementing its new 5-year strategic plan, *Flight Plan*, which focuses on three core strategic drivers to address the biodiversity and climate crises as embodied by the loss of nearly three billion birds from the North American avifauna since 1970: (1) a hemispheric approach to bird conservation, (2) finding climate crisis solutions, and (3) ensuring all people feel included and empowered in the movement to protect birds. Audubon's hemispheric approach is focused on protecting birds and the places they need throughout their entire lifecycle. In Latin America, Audubon now has robust programs in Columbia, Chile, Panama, and the Bahamas and is expanding into additional countries. Two of the key initiatives underway in Latin America and beyond are: [Conserva Aves](#), a large-scale partnership initiative that is bringing millions of dollars to protect portfolios of sites important to birds across the region, and the [America Flyways Initiative](#), another very large partnership initiative that highlights bird conservation needs within the context of infrastructure projects supported by international development bank investments. In Canada, Audubon's focus is on protection of large landscapes. Some of the largest conservation efforts in the world are occurring in Canada and are being led by Indigenous Nations, in whose traditional territories the vast and largely pristine boreal forest lies. There are currently over 100 million acres of proposed Indigenous Protected Areas in Canada, and Audubon is engaging with many Indigenous Nations to [support their efforts](#) through providing science, technical assistance, and communications.

Action Items / Resolutions / Motions

- Finalize the work plan.
- Conduct a virtual Committee meeting.

OTHER ITEMS MENTIONED:

Safari Club International was looking for input from the Provinces and Territories on the proposed ban on imports of elephant ivory and rhino horn, including trophies to Canada. More info here: <https://www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p1/2023/2023-06-24/html/reg3-eng.html>

Wild Sheep Foundation Update: The Mexico CITES authorities is interested in pursuing removing

desert bighorn sheep from CITES. They also told us they would need financial help in obtaining the necessary information across the northern Mexican States. We have initiated the following:

- WSF's affiliate, the Mexico Council is collaborating with Mexico CITES authorities in developing a proposal for survey and inventory work that needs to be completed in order to advance delisting desert bighorn sheep from CITES.
- The WSF Board of Directors have pledged up to \$250,000 to support this effort.
- We are expecting a finalized proposal sometime in next few months.

We just received the final report from Kazakhstan for the 2022 argali survey they did last year. This survey was funded by WSF and our Central Asia affiliate the Kazakhstan Wildlife Foundation (KWF). We also funded travel for wildlife biologists from Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to participate in the survey. We continue to work with the USFWS on several levels to do all we can to assure good information is presented to them, to create vital in-country points of contact between Central Asia wildlife biologists and the USFWS, and to improve communication between the Service and Central Asian countries. WSF has long been a Member of CIC and recently became an Associate Member of FACE which allows WSF to engage in meetings within the EU Parliament regarding the important of sustainable use and IPLC , role of hunters in science, and firearms import/export proposed rule revisions.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED:

Submitted by Ryan Brown and Christie Curley

Committee Member Attendees:

Ryan Brown, Virginia Department of Wildlife Conservation
Don Morgan, USFWS
Mike O'Brien, Fur Institute of Canada
Mike Ielmini, U.S. Forest Service
Will Dillman, South Carolina DNR
Matt Eckert, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Jennifer Sheehan, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Paul Wagner, USGS-EMA
Gordon Batcheller, NEAFWA
Stewart Liley, NM Game and Fish
Buddy Baker, SEAFWA
Jeremy Clair, Safari Club International
Driskus Gissing, Government of Nunavut
Doug Bear, USGS

Non-Committee Members Attendees:

Beth Lebow, US Forest Service
Mark Chase, USFWS
Marc Cattet, Government of Yukon
Mike O'brien, Fur Institute of Canada
Tristan Beijer, FACE
Jennifer Psyllakis, Province of BC, Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Dave Kay, AB Forestry and Parks
David Pezderie, Canadian Wildlife Federation
Heather Sayine-crawford, Government Northwest Territories- ECC

Hannah Rasker, Y2Y
Sheldon Jordon, Canadian Wildlife Service
Rachel Boratto, Monitor Conservation Research Society
Elsa Haubold, USFWS
Travis Ripley, Government of Alberta
Leroy Littlebear, Small Robes Band of the Blood Indian Tribe, University of Lethbridge
Casey Burns, Bureau of Land Management
Lane Nothman, National Audubon Society
Regina Lennox, Safari Club International
Laura Conlee, Missouri Department of Conservation
Gray Thornton, Wild Sheep Foundation
Patricia Dwyer, Canadian Wildlife Federation
John Williams, Canadian Wildlife Federation
Nick Wong, Canadian Council on Invasive Species
Craig Johnson, Alberta Fish and Wildlife
Dave Kostersky, DU Canada
Rodrigo Solis, Province of BC, Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Courtney Gregg, Nature Conservancy of Canada
Mike Canning, Utah DWR
Levi Hinton, AFWA Legal Intern
Jonathan Campagna, Wildlife Enforcement- Government of Canada
Dana Cole, USDA/WS National Feral Swine Program
Todd Shury, Parks Canada
Hugh Hunt, Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee
Cameron Ingram, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Jenny Gleeson, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Avril Nagel, Province of BC, Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Andrew Boyne, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources
Ben Mulligan, Alaska Department of Fish and Wildlife
Doug Chiasson, Fur Institute of Canada
Cameron Mack, Wildlife Habitat Canada
Daniel Buford, Federal Highway Administration
Colleen Fletcher, Federal Highway Administration
Craig Martin, USFWS
Rena Kluk Kiehl, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission