**Federal Aid Coordinators Working Group Report**

**To**

**Fish and Wildlife Trust Funds Committee**

**113th Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting**

**Calgary, Alberta (2023)**

**Federal Aid Coordinators Working Group (FACWG) Charge:**

1. Provide recommendations for and complete assignments made by the Fish and Wildlife Trust Funds Committee (FWTFC) Chair
2. Provide U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) a means for early review and recommendations for new actions or revisions to WSFR program, procedures, policies and/or legislation
3. Solicit input from State federal aid coordinators on topics applicable to FWTFC meeting agenda topics and WSFR program management and provide that input to FWTFC Chair and WSFR regional chiefs during regularly scheduled meetings
4. To ensure consistent WSFR program administration and new program implementation; provide technical guidance and assistance to WSFR on matters such as updates to the WSFR Toolkit and FA wiki website, implementation of Director’s Orders, identification of State training needs, “trouble-shooting” existing practices and recommending solutions.
5. Identify emerging issues that may result from audits or new funding.
6. Inform other State federal aid coordinators in respective region of FACWG activities.

# FACWG Membership:

The current members of the FACWG are found below. New terms of the members will begin October 1, 2023 with new member Graham Larson replacing Adam Brooks. The list of new members will be provided to the Fish and Wildlife Trust Funds Committee.

Regions 1, 7, 8: Brenda Bowers (AK)

Region 2: Marianne Cox (AZ)

Region 3: Stacy Xenakis (OH)

Region 4: Matthew Warriner (AR), Chair

Region 5: Veronica Masson (RI)

Region 6: Adam Brooks (MT), Vice Chair

The FACWG has representation on the following working group:

* TRACS Working Group: Adam Brooks (MN)

# FACWG Subgroups

# Two subgroups have been formed by the FACWG to develop best management practices to assist States with real property status reporting and monitoring, and subaward management. FACWG members and other State subject matter experts will coordinate with WSFR on the development of these BMPs. The FACWG believes that BMPs to assist States in the status reporting and monitoring of real property acquired with WSFR grant funds or match is of the utmost importance.

# Real property status reporting is a requirement of 2 CFR 200 and was the subject of an OIG management advisory pertaining to real property. WSFR coordinated with the FACWG and the TRACS WG in the development of the timing and process of the reporting. Reporting will be done through TRACS which DOI approved as an alternative to the SF-429 Real Property Status Report forms. The reporting will entail the States reporting if the property is still being used for the purpose for which is was acquired and in compliance with award terms and conditions and regulations. The second subgroup will develop BMPs to assist States in the management of subawards. Subaward oversight and management is a frequent finding in the OIG audits. The FACWG believes these BMPs could improve States compliance. These BMPs will be provided to the Trust Funds Committee for review and adoption.

# Since the report made to the Trust Funds Committee at the 2023 North American meeting, the Real Property BMPs Subgroup with members from Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Minnesota, Montana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and WSFR headquarters and regionals offices have started on the development of the BMPs. Small teams have formed to draft sections on topics such as monitoring of real property, purpose, data management and other topics.

# The Subaward BMPs Subgroup will be meeting in October 2023 to begin its work with team members from Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, U.S. Virgin Islands and WSFR headquarters and regional offices. Preliminary work is being done to compile audit findings related to subaward management. The findings will help focus the team on the core problems and provide direction in the development of the BMPs.

# Grant Solutions/TRACS Efficiencies

The duplication of effort and inefficiencies within Grant Solutions and TRACS is still a significant concern for the FACWG. The FACs report an increased burden, a burden also impacting Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) staff as well. It is paramount that actions continue to be taken to improve the operational effectiveness of these two systems. We understand that the TRACS WG and WSFR are actively working to improve the effectiveness of these systems. The FACWG appreciate the diligence and commitment of the TRACS WG and WSFR and encourages the prioritization of improvements to these systems.

# TRACS

The FACWG continues to actively monitor the implementation of TRACS. As opportunities and challenges are identified, the FACWG will work jointly with WSFR and solicit input from the FACs and disseminate information as needed. Some of our members actively participate on the TRACS WG addressing specific issues like equipment needs, amendments, financial requirements in TRACS vs. Grants Solutions, etc. The FACWG will continue to work collaboratively with the TRACS WG and WSFR to develop solutions.

# Collaborative Conservation Initiatives

The FACWG continues to support WSFR in their efforts to obtain approval of a class of awards known as Collaborative Conservation Initiatives (CCI). The benefits of CCIs are the conservation and program efficiencies that can be achieved when States’ resources and partnership efforts are centrally coordinated and leveraged to address shared species management challenges. The FACWG will continue to stay engaged on the establishment of CCIs and provide input.

# FACWG/WSFR Meetings

The FACWG held its second quarterly meeting with WSFR headquarters and regional managers on August 17, 2023. These regularly scheduled virtual meetings enhance communication between WSFR and the FACWG and provide opportunities for further collaboration and problem solving. Topics included JTF Issues ID, regulatory update (50 CFR 80 and CVA), Collaborative Conservation Initiatives, unfunded liabilities, Grant Solutions, ASAP change, national survey and real property reporting.

The FACWG will meet jointly with WSFR regional managers and headquarters administration tentatively scheduled for February 2024. The FACWG plans to expand its in-person break out session at this meeting. Continuation of these in-person meetings are vitally important to conveying the perspective of FACs to WSFR leadership. FACWG members and alternates in their transition year will be provided invitational travel by WSFR headquarters.

**NEPA Process Streamlining**

With the passage of legislation that amended NEPA, it appears the streamlining of NEPA compliance processes with new categorical exclusions may not feasible anytime soon. As you may recall, the working group identified the streamlining of NEPA compliance processes with new exclusions as a priority for us and planned to collaborate with WSFR on solutions to improve efficiency of project administration and implementation. The list of categorical exclusions was last updated in 2004. The working group supports identifying other solutions that will assist state fish and wildlife agencies in streamlining the NEPA compliance process where feasible while still protecting the human environment. Streamlining the NEPA compliance process will also improve the efficiency of WSFR staff as well. Possible solutions may include the development of programmatic environmental assessments. Some regions already have programmatic environmental assessments to streamline disposals of real property acquired with Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program grants. The working group supports these and other solutions and will collaborate and support WSFR in streamlining the NEPA compliance process.

**On the Horizon**

The FACWG continues to meet each month to address WSFR-related topics important to the States and to work more closely with WSFR staff. These meetings provide the means for the FACWG to be better equipped to respond to emerging issues.

The FACWG has identified a need to evaluate State federal aid coordinators’ workflow complexities to better understand staffing capacity. Members have begun drafting a document to justify the evaluation and support a request to initiate the evaluation.

**Federal Aid Coordinator’s Working Group Membership Roster (September 2023)**

**Regions 1, 7, and 8 (AK, WA, ID, CA, OR, HI, NV, American Samoa, Guam and Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands)**

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**Region 4 (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, PR and USVI)**

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**Region 5 (NY, VT, NH, ME, MA, CT, RI, PA, NJ, DE, MD, WV, VA and DC)**

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