



HUMAN WILDLIFE CONFLICT WORKING GROUP

Chair: Brian Wakeling (Montana)

Vice-Chair: Doug Brimeyer (Wyoming)

Tuesday, March 26th, 2024

1:00 – 3:00 PM (EDT)

[89th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference](#)

Meeting Minutes

- Call to Order/Review Agenda/Introductions (B. Wakeling/D. Brimeyer)
 - Chairman Wakeling called the meeting to order
 - ~45 members and guests attended the meeting

- Approval of Minutes from the previous meeting (B. Wakeling)
 - **Vote of Acclamation:** A motion to approve the minutes from the meeting during the AFWA Annual Meeting in Calgary, Alberta, Canada was made by Chairman Wakeling, seconded by a member, and unanimously carried by membership present. Vote of acclamation with unanimous consent **carries**.

- AFWA Multistate Conservation Grant Update: National survey of how agencies manage and fund wildlife conflicts (Lou Cornicelli, Southwick Associates; Bill Moritz, Wildlife Management Institute)
 - Human-wildlife conflicts (HWCs) are increasing across the United States. State Wildlife Agencies (SWA) under the Public Trust Document have been given the authority to manage wildlife to include most of the species implicated in HWCs. Concomitantly, each SWA has different authorities, policies, levels of species protection, and most importantly, unique ways of funding and managing HWC mitigation programs. Until recently, little information was available summarizing how SWA fund and staff their programs. Given increased demands for a finite pool of funding, wildlife managers often compete for funds that could otherwise be used for other higher priority conservation needs. In essence, the HWC programs have largely become a SWA unfunded mandate.
 - **A final report is pending and will be distributed to all State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, some Federal agencies that work in this area, and members and guests of the Human-Wildlife Conflict Working Group. It will be posted on various websites including the AFWA site, WMI, site and Southwick Associates site.**
 - **Some study highlights:**
 - Project goal was to survey state fish and wildlife conflict managers to determine staffing, funding, and responsibilities
 - Received responses from 43 states
 - Thank responding states for completing this 'unfunded mandate'
 - States respond to a broad array of human-wildlife conflict. Not going away – likely going to get worse

- Majority of funding comes from the game and fish fund
- HWC response is a mandate without a dedicated funding source
- Responding agencies spent \$16M last year
- Slippery slope using license dollars in some cases
- Not all species are under state control
- USDA spends a lot of money; however, states still respond in one form or another
- **Study Contact Information:**
 - Lou Cornicelli, Southwick Associates, Lou@SouthwickAssociates.com
 - Bill Moritz, Wildlife Management Institute, bmoritz@wildlifemgt.org
 - Brian Wakeling, Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks, brian.wakeling@mt.gov
 - Bryant White, AFWA, bwhite@fishwildlife.org
- USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services (Jessica Fantinato, Assistant Deputy Administrator)
 - AFWA and Wildlife Services have partnered to deliver a symposium and panel discussion during The Wildlife Society Conference this fall on **black vulture management**. For more information on this please contact Bryant White (bwhite@fishwildlife.org), Bradley Wilkinson (bwilkinson@fishwildlife.org), Keith Wehner (keith.p.wehner@usda.gov), Margaret Pepper (margaret.a.pepper@usda.gov)
 - Please find the **full report attached to the Wildlife Resource Policy Committee** (page 5-7)
- Wildlife Management Institute (Bill Moritz)
 - SEAFWA/WMI Black Bear Resistant Product Testing Program/feral swine toxicant delivery devices:
 - WMI officially kicked off the Black Bear Resistant Testing Program on April 1, 2023. To date fifteen products have been tested. Of those, eight have passed testing against captive black bears and seven have failed. Tests consist of sixty minutes of contact time with bears in a zoo with bait/ attractant inside of the container being tested. Food (backpacking) containers, trashcans, and a composter have been tested.
 - No tests have been performed on feral swine toxicant delivery devices. Testing for these devices will consist of the same captive bear testing and additional testing in the field in locations where both feral swine and black bears are common.
- Update on AFWA papers: Urban Coyote publication/Managing Conflicts with Beavers (B. Wakeling)
 - The conflicts with urban coyote manuscript has been submitted to Human Wildlife Interactions for publication in the Berryman Institute Monograph Series. The document has been accepted and is awaiting layout and design. We anticipate the document will be available following publication in late Fall 2024.
 - The paper on managing human/wildlife conflicts with beavers is in the early stages of writing. A first draft of the document was submitted to the Human-Wildlife Conflict Working Group and the Wildlife Resource Policy Working Group for review. It will be distributed electronically along with these minutes to both the Working Group and Committee.
 - Please provide comments on the draft beaver conflict document to Bryant White or Brian Wakeling by June 1, 2024.
- Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment for the Use of Wildlife Damage Management Methods by APHIS-Wildlife Services (Bryant White)

- See USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services Report (page 7)
- USGS National Climate Adaptation Science Center: Impacts of Climate Change to Wildlife Conflicts (Kate Malpeli) Kate Malpeli (kmalpeli@usgs.gov)
- Since the last working group meeting, the USGS National CASC has continued to make progress on products related to understanding the effects of climate on human-wildlife conflict.
 - **Product 1: “[The Effects of Climate on Bear Biology and Behavior, and Implications for Human-Bear Conflict](#)” (click to view/download the article)**
 - A team of USGS researchers systematically synthesized peer-reviewed studies to identify the direct and indirect mechanisms by which climate variability and change have already and could potentially affect black and brown bears and their interactions with humans in North America.
 - **Product 2: Fact Sheets**
 - This is meant to be a series of species-specific fact sheets, where each fact sheet is a mini synthesis on how climate affects that species and the implications for conflict. Our first fact sheet will be focused on **feral swine**, and we are currently in the process of synthesizing the literature.
- Roundtable: State/Federal/Tribal/Provincial/Regional Associations/AFWA Members
 - **Idaho:**
 - Depredation- prevention/compensation remain issues
 - Need to keep training staff on conflict management
 - HPAI is an issue
 - **Michigan:**
 - Overabundant deer and geese
 - Managing social tolerance
 - Non-lethal beaver program
 - Expanding conflicts with black bears in southern Michigan
 - Mute swans also an issue
 - **Nevada:**
 - Coyotes in urban areas
 - Black bears in the Tahoe Basin
 - Potential Wolf sightings, new to the state
 - **Texas:**
 - Urban deer remain a conflict concern
 - Banning canned hunts for mountain lions
 - Potential regulation requiring a 36 hour trap check
 - May discontinue the light goose conservation order due to fewer geese and fewer hunters
 - Urban rookeries of cattle egrets in San Antonio area
 - Urban coyotes in the Dallas/Fort Worth area
 - 9 specialized staff for the entire state to deal with wildlife conflicts
 - Black bears are making a comeback in south Texas; creating some conflicts in urban areas
 - **Utah:**
 - During legislative session it was determined at the urban wildlife interface that new developments may not be provided with depredation assistance/compensations unless they follow the DWR guidance
 - Municipalities that prevent the agency from managing wildlife conflicts through municipality directives will not be assisted by DWR
 - **National Park Service:**

- Human wildlife conflicts are common with bison, bears and are often unfortunately created by behaviors of the public
 - Staff are being equipped with strategies to address these conflicts
 - Training modules for Law Enforcement rangers for humanely dispatching animals; using non-lead ammo
- **Oregon:**
 - Wolverine sightings in metro Portland area and Coastal Range in the south
 - Colorado Parks and Wildlife took 10 wolves from Oregon to initiate their reintroduction program
 - Had an issue with some wolves that had been poisoned and this effected many other species
 - Sea Lion removals continue with Stellar sea lions to reduce depredation on salmonids
 - A draft of the document on humane dispatch of wildlife by agency personnel is expected by September
- **Florida:**
 - A stand your ground bill regarding black bears was introduced such that the public may take a black bear if threatened or have immediate property damage
 - Urban coyote attacks
 - Gopher turtles, American alligators and crocodiles
 - Shore nesting birds
 - Iguanas
 - Burrowing owls
 - Take of endangered sharks by fishing
 - Sea turtle protection due to encroachment on protected areas and depredation
- **US Army:**
 - Issues at some posts mainly with black bears due to trash cans
 - Deer on posts
- **Colorado:**
 - Human/black bear conflict program get funded at \$1 million dollars per year; has helped municipalities get bear proof trash cans
 - Mountain lion conflict management plan for east and west, public comment in May, commission vote in August
 - Wolves will be tracked at the watershed level
 - Working on a conflict management program; funded by license plates
 - Depredation funding from general funds/oil and gas funds
 - Developing a statewide beaver management plan
 - Must also write a wolverine reintroduction/management plan
- **Montana:**
 - Issues with grizzly bears, moose
 - a river otter attacked and hospitalized two women
- **Wrap-up Discussion and Assignments for Next Meeting (B. Wakeling/D. Brimeyer)**
 - Please review the draft document on managing conflicts with beavers and provide comments to Brian Wakeling or Bryant White by June 1, 2024.

**Wildlife Resource Policy Committee/ Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group Updates
WS Personnel Updates**

WS has undergone several changes in high level leadership positions at the Regional and State levels during FY23-24.

- Wendy Anderson is the now Western Region Director and Terry Smith and Scott Alls are Western Region Assistant Directors. Keith Wehner is now the Eastern Region Director.
- WS has new State Directors in WY (Jaren Zierenberg), CA (Jeff Flores) and TX (Ken Gruver)
- The joint WA/AK program recently separated to provide more opportunities for growth and expansion. The State Director for the new AK program is Spencer Atkinson.
- Kendra Cross is the new Deputy Director of Wildlife Operations in WS' Operational Support Staff.
- The State Director positions for the ND/SD and AL programs are vacant and are utilizing acting State Directors until WS fills those positions.

National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC)

- On October 4 and 5, members from the NWSAC met for the first time in Washington, DC to discuss issues relative to WS and its mission. (In early 2023 Secretary Vilsack selected NWSAC members to represent program stakeholders from academia, airport safety, farming/livestock producers, state wildlife agencies, among others.)
- The NWSAC serves as an open forum for diverse interests to have a voice in WS policies, guidance, and strategic planning. Committee members are appointed for a 2-year term and can serve up to three consecutive two-year terms. We would particularly like to thank Ron Reagan (AFWA Executive Director and NWSAC member) for his membership.
- The NWSAC selected members, John Michael Tomeček (Academia, TX) as their chair, and Sherry Wilson Russell (State/County Government and Associations, MO) as their vice chair.
- NWSAC members reviewed prior committee recommendations and worked to develop new recommendations based on current priorities and values. NWSAC Chair Tomeček shared the final committee developed recommendations with MRP and OA, for provision to the Secretary in November 2023. WS will host a second NWSAC meeting in 2024.

Wildlife disease updates - Dr. Lenoach gave a more detailed update at Fish & Wildlife committee.

HPAI

- Thank you to all the states for all your help in sampling, banding, hunter harvest, and property access.
- WS continues to conduct national surveillance of wild waterfowl monitoring for avian influenza viruses, targeting surveillance in all four flyways, and 49 states. WS collected 31,086 samples during the 2022-2023 surveillance year and have collected 40,500 samples as of January 12, 2024, in the current 2023-2024 surveillance year. WS has a target number of 41,711 by April 20, 2024.
- WS updates HPAI detection data weekly on the APHIS website.

Wildlife Biosecurity Assessments

- Risk for domestic poultry is still high. With multiple wild bird species affected (both apparently healthy wild birds and sick/dead wild birds), risk to poultry producers exists in all 4 flyways.
- WS is receiving requests from large poultry operations in 26 states to conduct bird/wildlife assessments and operational wildlife control on their premises for reducing interactions between wild and domestic birds and transmission risk for HPAI.
- WS implemented a pilot program for biosecurity assessments on poultry operations in four upper Midwest states (IA, MN, SD, ND)
- The program's goal is to assess every poultry barn/facility in all four states and find areas where wild birds gain access to poultry or to poultry feed, air, or water. And make recommendations to the producers as to how to mitigate the risk.

CWD

- WS state operation programs work cooperatively with State Wildlife and Agriculture Health programs (~20 states) on CWD surveillance, targeted cervid removals, and assistance at hunter check points. In ~14 States, during unrelated deer removal projects, WS biologists continue collecting and submitting CWD samples to State diagnostic labs supporting CWD surveillance.
- In April 2023, APHIS announced approximately \$12.1 million for states, Tribes, universities, and research institutes to further develop and implement CWD management and response activities in wild and farmed cervids across three separate funding opportunities. We are about to announce a similar opportunity for 2024 – should come out around April 1.

Rabies-WS NE Rabies Work

- A stray kitten found in Omaha, NE was confirmed with the raccoon rabies virus variant (RRVV) on October 6, 2023, by the Nebraska Veterinary Diagnostic Center (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) and the CDC. This variant has historically not been found outside the eastern US (>800 miles from Omaha). Expansion of this variant to an entirely new geographic area would place millions more Americans and domestic animals/livestock at risk for rabies exposure. So we collaborated with the CDC, the Nebraska Departments of Health and Agriculture, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Douglas County Health Department (DCHD), Nebraska Humane Society, Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Nebraska Veterinary Diagnostic Center, and other agencies to develop an emergency response plan to address this index case.
- In response to this possible rabies expansion, enhanced rabies surveillance efforts were initiated October 14 and led by the CDC. Through December 31, 2023, 325 animals (mostly raccoons) have been tested for rabies (all negative). This surveillance will continue through this month given potentially long incubation periods of rabies.
- We also conducted a trap-vaccinate-release effort (in a 5-km radius around the rabid kitten) Oct 23 through Nov 2, 2023 and hand vaccinated 804 animals (757 raccoons, 42 skunks, 4 feral cats, 1 red fox).
- We worked with CDC, the Nebraska Departments of Agriculture and Health, and DCHD to distribute 18,000 oral rabies vaccine baits in a 10-km radius around the rabid kitten (November 1-3, 2023).
- Genetic characterization of the variant showed it was most closely related to raccoon rabies in the TN/NC area and genetic characterization of the kitten showed it originated in the eastern US, leading wildlife rabies managers to believe the kitten (or it's potentially rabid mother) were relocated to Omaha from the eastern United States. To date, the rabies management efforts in Omaha have prevented the further spread of RRVV with no additional cases beyond the index kitten.

Feral Swine – detailed update provided by Mike Marlow in the Feral Swine sub-committee meeting

- The WS National Feral Swine Program (NFSP) conducts operations in 34 states and three territories to control existing and emerging populations of invasive feral swine. We have eliminated feral swine in twelve states since the beginning of the NFSP (declared eliminated in CO, ID, MD, MN, ME, NJ, and NY, while detecting for elimination in IA, IN, VT, WA, and WI).
 - CO and MN transferred to elimination status in 2023.
 - IN moved to detection status in 2024.
 - In states where feral swine elimination has occurred, NFSP continues to provide support, as needed to maintain outreach, and eliminate new incursions.
- NFSP also conducts targeted surveillance for diseases of highest concern.
 - The risk-based surveillance system prioritizes collection of disease samples in areas at highest risk of foreign animal disease entry and areas with high numbers of domestic pigs.
 - Our National surveillance includes serosurveillance for classical swine fever, brucellosis, and pseudorabies.
 - Targeted surveillance also occurs for African Swine Fever in the U.S. Protection Zone (USVI and PR) and in 12 states (AL, AZ, CA, FL, GA, LA, MS, NM, OK, SC, TN, and TX). This includes surveillance for both active infection (PCR) and historical exposure (serology (ELISA)).

Farm Bill Update

- As a reminder, the 2018 Farm Bill, which ended at the end of FY23, provided \$75 million split equally between WS and NRCS over five years, to create the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (FSCP), which augmented the NFSP.
 - Using this funding, WS implemented feral swine management activities in 34 pilot projects in 12 states (AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, HI, MO, OK, and TX).
 - Because of the sustained efforts in pilot projects and the use of innovative technologies such as unmanned aerial systems; remotely managed traps using telemetry; and science-based camera monitoring techniques, feral swine elimination occurred in several areas and dramatically reduced in others, resulting in positive economic outcomes reported by landowners in pilot project areas.
- While Congress writes the new Farm Bill, USDA and APHIS are ready to provide technical assistance and other support to help them throughout the process. In the meantime, Continuing Resolution (H.R. 6363) provided extensions, adding an additional \$15M, split between APHIS and NRCS to continue the FSCP through FY24.

Wolf Update

WS Evidence Standards for Determining Livestock Depredations by Mexican Wolves in AZ and NM

- During the last 5 years, the USFWS, AZ Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), NM Department of Fish and Game (NMDFG), and Western Watersheds Project have claimed the quality of WS Mexican wolf depredation investigations have declined over time, potentially leading to producers receiving compensation for livestock that may not have been killed by wolves.
- So in July 2022, WS began setting up written Standards of Evidence (SOEs) for use in finding if Mexican wolf predation is confirmed, probable, or some other category (unknown or other cause).
 - WS' determination of depredation by Mexican wolves relies solely on the physical evidence available at the time of the investigation. The core SOE confirming Mexican wolf predation is presence of subcutaneous hemorrhage and underlying tissue damage. This physical evidence indicates that the animal was alive when it was bitten by the wolf and that the wolf bites were not associated with scavenging an animal that was already dead. This aligns with the standards used by WS in MT, WI, and OR. State wildlife agencies tasked with managing wolves apply similar SOEs for confirming wolf related livestock depredations.
 - WS is not aware of any entity conducting wolf depredation investigations not requiring subcutaneous hemorrhage for confirming wolf predation. The USFWS and the state wildlife agencies in NM and AZ agree with this standard, while cattle organizations do not.
- APHIS reviewed and considered the best available science, practices, and comments received on its proposed written standards, and found that utilizing the SOEs is the most scientifically sound and consistently applied method to conduct Mexican wolf depredation investigations in AZ and NM. WS received comments on the development of these written SOEs from stakeholders, including several groups representing livestock producers. We approved these SOEs in late August 2023 and WS advanced them to federal and state management agencies in NM and AZ, as well as various stakeholders. And USFWS is currently updating their SOP to match the SOE.

Quick update on Risk Assessments

- WS has been preparing risk assessments (RAs) on many of the methods it uses, which analyze the impacts of these WDM methods on people and the environment. We truly appreciate AFWA's ongoing assistance in selecting peer reviewers to review with our Risk Assessments.
- All assessments (including drafts) are available to the public on the APHIS-WS-NEPA webpage.
- We truly thank Bryant White - our primary POC for Risk Assessments.
- WS has completed 25 Risk Assessments.
 - Three RAs are in the external review process (Registered Chemical Repellents, Minimum Risk Pesticides, and Diphacinone, sent to AFWA in May and September, respectively). WS posted drafts of these on the WS internet site.