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**Wildlife Resources Policy Committee Report**

Chair: Jim Douglas

Vice-chair: Chuck Sykes

Meeting of March 10, 2017

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting

Spokane, WA

**Committee Charge:** *To discuss and develop recommendations on Association positions related to federal laws, regulations and policies concerning habitat conservation, wildlife resources and related funding for such programs as well as wildlife management practices including those concerned with problem or nuisance wildlife, and emerging issues (e.g., commercial trade). The committee also stays abreast of threatened and endangered species wildlife issues, state legislation pertaining to wildlife management and wildlife diversity funding initiatives.*

**Scheduled Discussion Items**

The meeting was convened at 8:08 AM by Chairman Jim Douglas. He asked participants to introduce themselves and asked committee members to begin thinking about the work plan for next year and send him ideas or questions.

Wildlife Services Report

Martin Mendoza-Bill Clay could not attend because he is testifying on the budget this week.

Larry Clark-Wildlife Services is conducting a 5-year study evaluating European guard dogs as a means to limit depredation. A report will be completed later this year that will include recommendations on breeds for different situations. A sodium nitrate based feral swine toxicant is under review by the EPA. Field trials are scheduled for spring 2018. Sodium nitrate starves the animal of oxygen and mortality typically occurs near the bait station with low animal awareness. Some secondary contamination can occur from consumption of the gut pile. There are use restrictions to reduce non-target mortality. Wildlife Services does not use warfarin-based toxicants like Kaput and decided not to go down that road for a variety of reasons and because there has not been a NEPA review. There is beginning to be some hype about the use of new genetic technology such as biopesticides. These will not be available for about 10 years but we need to be discussing now.

Martin Mendoza-Wildlife Services is working with 41 states on feral swine control. Six have reached detection status. If no feral swine are detected in a state in two consecutive years then it is considered to be feral swine free. Samples from 3,000 feral swine were taken to test for zoonotic disease on behalf of the Food Safety Inspection Service. A study will be published that examines the risk of disease to people from eating feral swine. Wildlife Services is working with the Fish and Wildlife Service on cormorant depredation. Janet reported that the Fish and Wildlife Service lost the ability to issue permits so we are working with the Service and states on roost dispersal. MS, AR and LA are actively involved in roost dispersal. We are looking into doing some limited take. The Midwinter roost count tallied 51,000 cormorants. The last survey tallied 44,000, the highest increase ever.

Gildo Tori-How long will it take to do the environmental assessment?

Janet-About a year.

Terry Messmer-Is there a production problem with the ingredient used for corvid control?

Larry Clark-The manufacturer had costs associated with a data call and stopped production. Wildlife Services tried to get a waiver but the company was sold and the new company decided not manufacture the product. The slowdown was caused because each manufacturer has to get their own approval. There is a stockpile of the control substance but distribution is being prioritized. Production should catch up in the next several years.

Jim Douglas-Will the new feral hog toxicant be labeled for states without bears? Will the states be kept in the loop?

Martin Mendota-We would like to have discussions with the state as we did with Gonacon.

Larry Clark-We should be thinking about having discussions about secondary hazards from Kaput at the fall meeting. We can talk off line on what that might look like.

Martin Mendota-Researchers working on best practices for guard dogs would benefit from working with the human wildlife conflict working group. All federal agencies are going through a budget exercise to reduce spending by 10%. A budget cut of that magnitude could have a significant impact on our work with partners.

Jim Douglas-Can you follow up with the working group on the toxicant and guard dog issues and suggest a timeline.

Martin Mendota-The airstrike MOU originally was intended for state agencies, the Fish and Wildlife Service and Wildlife Services. The idea was to create a platform so that state and federal agencies could cooperate. The MOU has been reviewed by the Department of Defense, AFWA, and Wildlife Services but issues have arisen between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Federal Aviation Administration. The MOU is important to Wildlife Services but the Fish and Wildlife Service has not been able to resolve their concerns. Wildlife Services has been trying to move this off center but without success.

Jim Douglas-Are there issues this committee could help with?

Martin Mendota-If appropriate, express the significance of addressing migratory birds on lands adjacent to airports. This could be done through a letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Jim Douglas-Can you share anything about the nature of the impasse?

Martin-I can do that.

Dan Taylor-Was the guard dog study done by your agency? Did you use a rigorous control?

Larry Clark-Yes. Using a control is difficult. The study was conducted in five states. We collared wolves, sheep and dogs and we mimicked encounters with deer to examine behavior. This was a typical field study that mostly showed spatial relationships such as how dogs react to sheep and humans. There was some qualitative data but the overall dataset was extensive.

Dan Taylor-Is other literature available?

Larry Clark-Not as extensive as this one. There are private individuals that do this work. Wildlife Services worked on this in the 1980s with Great Pyrenees Dogs and coyotes. A graduate student at the University of Utah is working on this issue.

Amphibian and Reptile Subcommittee Report

Priya Nanjappa-Cathy Sparks, the chair of the subcommittee was unable to attend. Twenty-two people attended the subcommittee meeting with good participation. There are no action items. We had planned to hear a presentation from a commercial harvester of snapping turtles but he had a family emergency. Others presented on the topic. We learned that even with size limit restrictions, there were population and demographic effects from harvest of snapping turtles and fecundity is being impacted. Snapping turtles must be 8-17 years of age before they reach sexual maturity. Harvest pressures are rising because of Asian food markets. There is some evidence that wild caught turtles are slipping into markets. A webinar on snapping turtles is being planned.

Keith Norris-Is Canada looking into this too?

Priya-Yes, we are sharing information with Canada.

Priya-The subcommittee heard a report on the sagebrush conservation strategy and an update from Partners for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC). PARC has completed its new strategic plan and will be developing a work plan. The PARC National Steering Committee met on Tuesday and received a national award. The Bureau of Land Management has developed a strategic plan for field offices to incorporate State Wildlife Action Plan goals for amphibian and reptiles into their work. Work continues on Bsal surveillance. AFWA received a grant to step up surveillance including captive animals and to investigate treatments. There are treatment options that could eliminate Bsal in captive populations.

Jim Douglas-Are any states looking at commercial harvest of snapping turtles?

Priya Nanjappa-Virginia has been conducting surveys the past four years.

Jim Douglas-Some states are concerned about commercial harvest. Does the subcommittee think this work will inform other states? Are there best management practices or do we need to facilitate a conversation with commercial harvesters? Is there action the committee can take? Should we circulate the research paper?

Priya Nanjappa-Iowa DNR is working a regulations but it is a sticky situation. Trapping can be lucrative for trappers who can make $13 dollars per hatchling. China and other Asian countries are starting their own farms. Red-eared sliders are being exported from China now and this could happen for snapping turtles.

Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group Report

Brian Wakeling-The working group has two ad hoc teams working on best practices for black bears and urban deer. Both teams are working on draft documents and they will share with the committee once completed. We will attempt to publish in the Human Wildlife Interactions Journal. We may take on additional species like coyotes in the future. WAFWA is sponsoring a mountain lion workshop on May 15-18, 2017. A large carnivore workshop originally planned for August will likely take place next year. A roundtable discussion was held.

Jim Douglas-We may need to talk with the AFWA Executive Committee to do determine what transforms into Best Management Practices versus policy statements. The work on black bear may fall somewhere in between. The Executive Committee may want to review papers before they go to publication. I will try to get some clarity from the Executive Committee.

Keith Norris-The Wildlife Society is interested in the black bear work and may be interested in having presentations at their conference in Albuquerque.

Brian Wakeling-The working group developed a position statement on diversionary feeding of black bears. The AFWA Executive Committee had some concerns, mostly relative to language being more confining than necessary. The working group tried to address these concerns. The position statement is not intended to affect legal baiting of bears or be prescriptive but instead to identify best available science. The working group reviewed comments and are in complete support. Once there is agreement by the committee it will be sent to the AFWA Executive Committee.

Ollie Torgerson-Offered a motion to approve the position statement. It was seconded and approved.

Registration of Kaput Feral Hog Toxicant

John Bowers-A new feral hog bait was registered by EPA on January 3. SEAFWA was not expecting the approval and asked its committee to review and communicate any concerns. Top concerns are potential impacts to sensitive species such as the Louisiana Black Bear, eastern spotted skunk and eagles and other raptors and threats to human health. Studies indicate that that there may be issues with feeders which could expose game species and hunters to contaminated meat. There are concerns about the longevity of the toxicant in the environment. Texas approved an emergency rule to use the bait but a judge issued a restraining order. Warfarin is typically used in confined structures where landscape impacts are minimized. We are seeking input from the committee and whether AFWA should engage on this issue.

Larry Clark-The states, usually through the Department of Agriculture, still have control of the use of this toxicant since there must be state registration. States should be encouraged to contact their state Department of Agriculture

John Bowers-The Georgia Department of Agriculture also has concerns and put approval on a slow track. Texas approved the use. I am not sure about other states.

Jim Douglas: What should we report to the Business Committee? Should we encourage state Directors to consult with their Department of Agriculture?

Dan Taylor-How imminent is the use of this product? What is the urgency?

John Bowers-It will depend on the state and if the Department of Agriculture opts to consult with the state fish and wildlife agency.

Mitch Marcus-I agree that Directors need to hear about this. The Indiana Department of Agriculture did not contact us about requests for registration. Does the Texas court decision apply only to Texas?

John Bowers-I have seen different interpretations but it is thought that it only applies to TX.

Comment-The State veterinarian in Virginia is concerned. If it is federally approved then it is likely the State will approve.

Jim Douglas-Could the committee put together a simple letter in the next few hours and take it to the Business Committee for action or should we have an action item with a general statement about our concerns.

Chuck Sykes-A letter will be difficult to pull together, maybe a simple statement would be better.

Jim Douglas-Chuck, can you draft a simple statement for the action item.

Bat Conservation

Jeremy Coleman-Whitenose Syndrome (WNS) is now found in 30 states. There was jump last year to Washington State. The fungus is also found in IA, MO, MN and eastern NE. There is speculation that the jump to WA could have from a shoe or boot since it is the same strain of fungus that is found in the eastern US. It’s also possible it moved to the state via bats. Surveillance efforts are occurring across the Pacific Northwest and upper Midwest. The Fish and Wildlife Service is providing capacity grants to the states. AFWA is also providing surveillance and research funding. The Northern long-eared bat was listed as threatened due to WNS. An assessment of little brown bats is underway. The Fish and Wildlife Service received a petition to list the tricolored bat. The 90-day finding will be published in the Federal Register soon. We are redoubling our efforts to do outreach to cavers and researchers. There are 14 hibernating bat species in the Northwest so there are concerns about additional population declines. We are hoping to address decontamination, targeting outreach to cavers and other resource users to reduce human spread. New research grants will be available soon. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation initiated the “Bats for the Future Fund” and will announce soon. Sunni Carr from KY and other state folks are involved in that partnership. Our focus is on developing tools, treatments and management options. We want to give states a more active role in development of the tools. The WNS subcommittee was stood down when the WNS Steering Committee was created, but may bring it back.

Brian Reichart- NA Bat is a multiagency continental monitoring effort to address bat monitoring at local, state, and landcape scales. The intent is to determine early warning signs of population decline, extinction and measuring recovery. The goal is to work with states and federal agencies to increase coverage to bolster sampling and area of inference. We will seek support from state and federal agencies to assist and provide cost share funding when possible.

Dan Taylor-This has been in the works for a while and it is great to see it take off. We had the first ever bat delisting for the lesser long-nosed bat. This bat was listed in 1988. It is a mine and cave rooster and through field work we found more colonies and got better counts. Management plans were developed for federal land. The bat will go from endangered to delisted, not just down-listed. A Bat Conservation International scientist published a paper on hoary bat decline from wind development. Approximately 200,000-400,000 bats are killed by turbines annually, 38% of the these are hoary bats. The paper looked at population growth and estimated there would be a 98% decline in the next 50 years. We are working on acoustic deterrents and changing blade speed to help mitigate mortality. The American Wind Wildlife Institute is applying these practices. The paper should serve as a heads up to start emphasizing mitigation due to the expected exponential increase in wind power capacity. Most mortality is happening over a short period during migration. Mortality rates are not evenly distributed.

Jim Dougals-Are there any requests to take any action?

Dan Taylor-Not at this time.

Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America’s Diverse Fish and Wildlife

Mark Humpert-Work continues on implementing the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel. We are hopeful that funding legislation will be introduced in the House of Representatives soon. A brand and associated communication materials are being developed for a legislative campaign. States are encouraged to pass resolutions supporting the effort.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:53

**Progress and Opportunities**

Progress made toward achievement of Goal 2 in the Association's Strategic Plan:

* Protect state agency statutory authority for management of fish and wildlife resources within their borders
* Promote state, provincial, territorial and federal agency understanding of authority and jurisdictional issues.

**Threats and Emerging Issues Identified**

Registration of Kaput toxicant for feral hog control could impact non-target species and put the health of hunters and their families at risk.

Harvest of snapping turtles could be having population impacts

**New Opportunities Identified**

None identified

**Action Items**

None

***Submitted by***: Jim Douglas