

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER**

**Chair: Julie Carter (AZ)**

**Vice-Chair: Robert Caccese (PA)**

**Date: Tuesday, March 26, 2024**

**Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM EDT**

**Ruby Room, Amway Grand Plaza**

**89th Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference**

**Grand Rapids, MI**

**Subcommittee Charge:** Identify, support, and communicate science, legal, policy and public involvement issues related to water that are of importance to fish and wildlife; and to support and build on recommendations from AFWA Drought Forum.

**Agenda**

Call to Order/Review Agenda/Approval of Minutes/Committee Charge – *Julie Carter, AZ*

* The 2023 Annual Meeting minutes were approved by consensus.

Introductions – *All*

Virtual Pre-Meeting Recap – *Julie Carter (AZ)*

* The Subcommittee on Water held a virtual pre-meeting on March 8, 2024.
* Update on the progress of the Instream Flow and Water Level Conservation Training Center concept
  + The Multistate Grant-funded Feasibility Assessment for the center, which was completed last November, documents the need for such a center.
  + A basic business plan and governance document have since been completed to progress the concept further.
  + The steering committee is looking for AFWA’s endorsement of the concept, similar to that which was provided for the first National Fish Habitat Action Plan in 2006. This endorsement will help the committee market the center to potential funders.
* Overview of the Lower Mississippi River Comprehensive Study
  + a fully federal funded USACE study to look at the management of the Lower Mississippi River and its tributaries.
  + Covers New Orleans, Vicksburg, Memphis, and St. Louis USACE districts
  + The study will take 5 years and cost $25M. The Corps is holding public listening sessions in the region.
  + The USACE is relying on each state’s point of contact, designated by the state governor, to handle state outreach and communication. This approach is creating friction and information gaps within the state agencies.
  + No lead Fish and Wildlife Service agency has been designated for FWCA
  + Comments due April 2
* Subcommittee members then held a roundtable discussion on water issues in their states. Topics included:
  + the effects of water supply issues on threatened fish in the Grand Canyon, shifting stocking seasons due to high temperatures
  + AIS issues downstream from hatcheries, and challenges getting towns to comply with drawdown permit conditions (not maintaining sufficient levels).
  + One bright spot was that PA expects to have some waters coming off its impairment list soon, thanks to a lot of work done on the Susquehanna River.

Roundtable on State, Province, and Partner Water Supply and Water Quality Issues – *All*

* Arkansas
  + Currently updating state water plan
  + Loosahatchie feasibility study- ecosystem restoration opportunities within 40 mile reach
  + Red River navigation- want updated version of Washita watershed study to determine what is going on in river
  + Arkansas river- improving navigation on the MKARNS (McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System) by deepening channel from 9 feet draft to 12 feet draft. Work is scheduled to begin in 2025. Arkansas fisheries has submitted comments.
* AFS
  + Several microplastic proposals in the works
  + One proposed research project will look at how structures are shedding microplastics in lakes and reservoirs
* Colorado
  + Water plan update
  + Over 100% snowpack this year
  + Off channel projects in development or proposed
  + Parameters for closing river to fishing e.g. when temperatures are high, water levels low, % flow…have been well received. Most are voluntary but Colorado has the ability to make them mandatory.
* South Carolina
  + Water plans for all watershed in South Carolina are underway
  + Edisto river- spawning habitat for sturgeon
  + Agriculture in SC can withdraw as much groundwater as it wants
* Ohio
  + Spending on projects to address water quality
  + Acquired 16,000 acres of wetlands
  + H2Ohio project- dam removals, riparian corridors, land acquisition
  + Lake Erie harmful algal bloom (HAB) issue- result of nutrient issues driven by the high density of animals in northwest Ohio
  + Gorge river dam removal should be complete by 2026
  + Stocking lake sturgeon later this year
  + Great Lakes Commission and Great Lakes Fisheries Commission and Canada signed agreement to work on nutrient management
* Wisconsin
  + Parts of the state in severe drought, which is impacting the water levels in the Wisconsin river
  + WI has not control over groundwater being withdrawn
  + Brook trout reserve program- working to identify areas where the species can survive in the face of climate change
  + PFAS- exceedingly high levels in some wells that have been tested. Consumption advisories are in place across the state. Neighboring states MI, MN) use different numbers than Wisconsin when determining whether consumption advisories should be issued.
* Utah
  + Good snowpack this year, with over 100% state-wide
  + Reservoirs are at 80-85% capacity
  + Currently revising state water plan
  + Lots of bills currently in the state legislature relating to conservation. This has to do with the low water levels in the Great Salt Lake.
* US Forest Service
  + Synthesizing research and developing a 5-year plan. Key themes: climate change, land management impacts, water quality, process-based restoration, impacts of disturbance
  + At a future meeting, would like to give update to the committee
* Idaho
  + Columbia River treaty being renegotiated with Canada. Will affect MT, WA, OR, ID
  + Treaty ends in 1-2 years
  + Discussions on ecological benefits, hydropower
  + Pumped storage projects have been popping up for a couple of years Questions about how these impact stratification, thermal regime of reservoirs, and the impacts on fisheries.
  + Population level impacts – catch rates have decreased when waters warmed
* Alaska
  + 40% of nation’s freshwater, but most of it is frozen. Only 1% allocated.
  + Difficult to get data on water here
  + Growing interest in pumped storage hydropower in Alaska
* AZ
  + Lake Powell and Lake Meade reservoirs very low
  + Issues providing water with CA, NV, AZ
  + EIS out- change flows to cool stream. Warm water fish now spawning in Grand Canyon. Have lost rainbow trout fishery.
  + AIS issue- New Zealand mud snails detected but not in high densities. Unsure of impact.
  + Currently vaccinating trout in hatcheries (Lactococcosis outbreak)
* MI
  + Can’t find relationship between PFAS and anything in the state- it is everywhere
  + Non-point source pollution, mainly phosphorus, is still a big problem. Agricultural use. One of the largest groundwater withdrawals in the country is in western MI
  + Wetland complexes to be installed.
* NC
  + Following the Supreme Court’s WOTUS decision, the state legislature made changes codifying that the state cannot be stricter than federal legislation
  + 50% of wetlands will be impacted by the decision
  + Exploring a pilot study to use sonar to treat black mat algae in reservoirs
  + State legislature gave $7M for dam removals 2 legislative sessions ago.

Instream Flow and Water Level Conservation Training Center Update

* Original center was run by USFWS and existed from 1974-2000
* Multi-disciplinary- law, science, public engagement
* In [xxx], AFS and IFC received a multi-state conservation grant to conduct a feasibility assessment for establishing a training center. This is an attempt to replace services and training lost when the FWS training center closed in 2000.
* Business plan is in the works, but will change. Important piece is the feasibility assessment.
* Seeking AFWA endorsement of the training concept—present a letter of support for AFWA to sign. Will have the letter prepared for consideration at the AFWA Annual Meeting this fall/

Government Affairs Update – *Ali Schwaab, AFWA*

* Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) Reform
* WRDA 2024
* ICWP/WSWC Policy Roundtable Recap

**AFWA SOW Background Companion Slides (Virgil Moore)**

[https://www.instreamflowcouncil.org/download/virgilmoore\_slides\_flow2018-pdf/?wpdmdl=11389&ind=5ccff16ab72bd](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/JdFcC1wN62Iw2L3HGIyEi?domain=instreamflowcouncil.org)

**AFWA SOW Background Dialogue (Virgil Moore)**

[https://www.instreamflowcouncil.org/download/virgilmoore\_dialogue\_flow2018-pdf/?wpdmdl=11387&ind=5ccff167db4da](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/X2aBCZ6n83unrXlfzxsXt?domain=instreamflowcouncil.org)