Working Lands for Wildlife Frameworks

NRCS released two “frameworks” to guide their conservation actions across the Great Plains Grasslands and Sagebrush Biome. The frameworks represent an update to, and 2021-2025 roadmap for implementation of, the Sage Grouse Initiative and Great Plains Grasslands Initiative, formerly the Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative. Each framework (Sagebrush and Grasslands) identifies overarching threats (land use conversion, woodland expansion, etc.), guides conservation implementation through by setting geographic focus areas and anticipated outcomes, and provides the scientific and technical resources underpinning the strategy.

Dedicated Funding for Wildlife Crossings Included in Transportation Bills

On June 10, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure advanced the INVEST in America Act (H.R. 3648), which includes one of AFWA’s major legislative priorities, dedicated funding for aquatic and terrestrial species habitat connectivity. The bill would provide annual funding of $100 million for the Wildlife Crossings Program through FY26. This followed the May 26 hearing in the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works where the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act of 2021 (S.1931), advanced to the full Senate with the inclusion of a nearly identical program funded through FY26 with $350 million total.

Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund Reauthorization Advancing

On June 16, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation advanced the Sport Fish Restoration and Recreational Boating Safety Act of 2021 (S. 1995), favorably reporting the legislation near-unanimously with only one member recorded in opposition. AFWA praised the bill’s sponsors, Committee Chair Cantwell (D-WA) and Ranking Member Wicker (R-MS), as well as the full Committee for advancing the legislation without amendment. A last-minute amendment was proposed that would have limited State Agencies’ authority to use the fund, but thanks to immediate efforts by our members and partners it was rejected by a vote of 19-9. Its companion legislation in the House, H.R. 3702, introduced by Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA), awaits a hearing in the House Natural Resources Committee. The only major change from last year’s legislation is the addition of dual-reporting language which would have the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council report to the Department of Commerce in addition to the Department of the Interior, amplifying the voice of recreational anglers.

Infrastructure Negotiations Intensifying

On June 24, President Biden announced his support for a $1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure plan formed in agreement with a group of 10 Senators, 5 from each side of the aisle. Negotiations will continue as they have yet to confirm enough support for passage, but it marks a significant step before Congress enters the still-pending August recess. While further details of the plan are yet to be revealed, the outline primarily focuses on traditional infrastructure rather than the broader provisions supported by the majority. However, it is likely that an additional infrastructure bill will be advanced through uni-partisan action via the reconciliation process.
AFWA is accepting applications for the full-time/exempt position of Bird Conservation Program Manager/North American Bird Conservation Initiative Coordinator. This position will lead the bird conservation initiatives and support the AFWA Bird Conservation Committee and the US North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI).

AFWA is also accepting applications for the positions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Contractor and Instructional Designer Contractor for Project WILD. For more information, visit www.fishwildlife.org/careers.

New Employee!
We are pleased to announce that Kurt Thiedewill join the AFWA family as our new Government Affairs Director.

New Employee!
We are pleased to announce that Kerry Wixted will join the AFWA family as our new Amphibian/Reptile and Invasive Species Program Manager.

2020 AFWA Annual Report
The Association recently released its 2020 Annual Report in which we focus on building resilience and the power of adaptation. Download at www.fishwildlife.org

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Recovering America’s Wildlife Act - Update
Last month’s Recovering America’s Wildlife Act virtual fly-in was a great success! Together as a coalition we conducted over 65 virtual meetings with congressional offices and gathered many new co-sponsors, bringing the total count to 85 on the House bill (H.R.2773). This was an excellent team effort coordinated by many of the Alliance for America’s Fish & Wildlife partners in DC, state fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and organizations in states and districts across the country. It is always good to see a plan come together and this one certainly presented some logistical challenges, but never underestimate a sophisticated coalition and a campaign driven by a shared vision for dedicated wildlife conservation funding. The response from the Hill was overwhelmingly positive on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers. This is truly a bipartisan bill supported by a broad and diverse coalition and we thank everyone for their participation and great work this week. We have also learned that the bill will be coming up for a hearing in the Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources on July 29th. Stay tuned for more details on that. We’ll want to get some touches in to the members of that subcommittee in advance of the hearing to encourage support. We are optimistic that we will see a companion bill introduced in the Senate as soon as this week or next and the groundwork laid last month will help to expedite the cosponsor push on that side as well. For your reference, see the materials prepared for the fly-in HERE. For any questions about the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, please contact Sean Saville at ssaville@fishwildlife.org; 202-441-4214.

State Wildlife Action Plans
The State Wildlife Action Plan and Landscape Conservation Working Group is continuing its work to develop guiding principles and recommendations to help State Wildlife Action Plans better guide and contribute to landscape conservation and be ready for Recovering America’s Wildlife Act implementation. The working group is led by Jon Regosin (MA) and includes representatives from state fish and wildlife agencies, USFWS, USFS, USGS, TNC, NWF and NatureServe and will present its report to the Wildlife Diversity Conservation and Funding Committee in September. The U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee recently passed its FY2022 mark (HR4372) which included sizeable increases for State & Tribal Wildlife Grants and other AFWA priorities.

Strategic Planning Updates
Work on operationalizing goals 1, 2 & 4 of AFWA’s new strategic plan continues on schedule. Timmons group, the consultants helping us, will present metrics and a prototype dashboard to Directors at the Annual Meeting in Providence, most likely on Sunday morning. We are looking forward to your feedback on the work that been done! Please contact jior@fishwildlife.org with any questions.

AFWA Annual Meeting Planning
The AFWA Annual Meeting will be held September 8-13, 2021, and will be a hybrid meeting:
• Committee meetings will be conducted through an online platform from Wednesday the 8th through Friday the 10th.
• Saturday the 11th will be a travel day for Directors and guests who are able to gather in person in Providence.
• Sunday the 12th through Tuesday the 14th we will hold in person, Director focused meetings.

All public meetings held in Providence will also be available online through the meeting web portal. We will also hold several online leadership development workshops open to all attendees. For more information and to register please go to the meeting website: https://www.afwaannualmeeting.org.