



ASSOCIATION *of*  
FISH & WILDLIFE  
AGENCIES

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## **Agricultural Conservation Committee Report**

Chair: Gregory Johnson (KY)

Vice-Chair: Jim Leach (MN)

March 30, 2018

Hilton Norfolk, The Main – Norfolk, VA

### **Committee Charge**

The **Agricultural Conservation Committee** is charged with advancing administrative and legislative policies which create, enhance, and protect fish and wildlife habitat and expand recreational access on farm, ranch, and forest land. The Committee is also charged with helping document program and policy benefits and outcomes, as well as assessing the habitat risks and impacts from biomass production, food and fiber production, and urban expansion to inform policy recommendations.

Meeting convened from 8:00am-12:00pm on Friday, March 30, 2018, chaired by Commissioner Gregory Johnson (KY) with 35 people in attendance, including 25 committee members.

### **Scheduled Discussion Items**

#### **Speakers and Presentations**

- Ed Boggess and Claire Beck with the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies gave an update on the Mid-America Regional Monarch Conservation Strategy.
  - o The Strategy is aligned with USFWS Policy for the Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE), and goals of the strategy include: providing certainty that conservation efforts will be effective and implemented, as well as leveraging authority of state wildlife agencies and resources of partner agencies to plan and implement an additional 1.3-1.8 billion milkweed stems embedded in diverse, forb-rich habitats in the eastern U.S. through voluntary, incentive-based programs.
  - o A public review draft of the strategy is available, with comments received through April 6, after which a final public review draft will be made available. In May, a final draft will be completed and submitted to the Monarch Board of Directors

and MAFWA Executive Committee. In July 2018, a MAFWA NFWF monarch regional conservation strategy implementation grant begins.

- The presentation was shared with the Committee along with this report.
- Alex Echols presented on the report entitled Heartland Waters Initiative, which was produced by the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation. The goal of the initiative and the white paper is to advance precision conservation in agriculture, and increase the use of “precision conservation to target lands with the highest ecological value and marginal agricultural value.” The report includes nine recommendations for achieving this goal, two of which were highlighted for the Committee.
  - The first innovation proposed is increasing decision support for farmers and conservation. These tools should support profitability to have widespread adopted as well as utilize technology and economics to invest where there is a high environmental return on investment.
  - The second proposal is to advance innovative conservation finance and move beyond “traditional USDA financing” and bring new sources of funding to agriculture conservation, particularly from private and public sources.
  - The Heartland Waters Initiative white paper is available [here](#), as well as a summary document [here](#).

### **2018 Farm Bill update and discussion**

- AFWA staff provided an update to the Committee on the 2018 Farm Bill, including Congressional activities, key issues, and timing. The Committee spent much of the conference working through the current issues in play with regards to reauthorization of the Farm Bill, and developing the Association’s positions on the proposals in front of Congress. While the Association’s [Policy Priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill](#) were adopted at the 2017 North American, new issues and proposals continue to be introduced into the conversation as the House and Senate both prepare to release their draft bills and move into committee markup. The bulk of the discussion about these policy proposals occurred in the ACC programmatic working group meetings, including the Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program/Conservation Stewardship Program, Forestry, and Farm Bill Easements Working Groups, in addition to the AFWA 2018 Farm Bill Working Group.
- With the likelihood of a one-year extension of the current farm bill increasing by the day, AFWA staff and the Committee will continue to advance the Association’s priorities on Capitol Hill and with the Administration, and will keep members updated as the process moves forward.

### **Federal Agency Updates**

- John Rissler, Easement Programs Team Leader for USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service, provided an update on NRCS programs. His presentation was shared with the Committee along with this report.
- Tom Melius, Midwest Regional Director for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provided an update for the Committee on USFWS activities as they relate to Farm Bill and private lands conservation programs. His update will be shared with the Committee in a separate document.

### **Other Agenda Items**

- Committee members acknowledged and applauded the innumerable contributions of Chuck Kowaleski to the Association and the wildlife conservation community throughout his career with Texas Parks & Wildlife. Chuck has decided to step down from his role as EQIP/CSP Working Group co-chair, but will continue to participate in the Committee and working groups. Anyone interested in serving as EQIP/CSP WG co-chair or vice-chair is encouraged to contact Andrew Schmidt or Matt Smith.
- The North American Bird Conservation Initiative's (NABCI) Private and Working Lands Subcommittee and Human Dimensions Subcommittee is proposing the development of a regularly occurring Private Lands Staff Forum to create an opportunity for private lands staff from state, federal, and non-governmental organizations to meet, exchange ideas, identify needs, and develop a community of practice that enhances their ability to effectively deliver Farm Bill and other private lands conservation programs. This idea is currently in the early planning stages and the subcommittees are reaching out to agencies and organizations that employ or engage private lands staff to seek their support and input in organizing a forum. A short survey/questionnaire is currently being developed to solicit input and gauge interest, and will be sent out to Farm Bill coordinators soon in a separate email. For questions or additional information, contact Todd Fearer ([tfearer@abcbirds.org](mailto:tfearer@abcbirds.org)) or Andrew Schmidt.

### **Action Items**

- There were no action items for the AFWA Business Meeting.