

International Relations Committee - Report

Meeting of September 8, 2021
Rick Jacobson (Connecticut), Co-Chair
Travis Ripley (Alberta), Co-Chair

Meeting convened from 1:00pm to 3:00pm ET. There were 31 people in attendance including 14 Committee members.

Potential dates of upcoming meetings:

- Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW): September 26 – 27, 2021
- Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) Open-Ended Working Group: January 2022
- Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Standing Committee: March/April 2022
- CBD Conference of the Parties (CoP): April 2022
- CITES CoP19: November 2022
- Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management: May 2022
- CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice: TBD

International Relations Workplan Update: Deb Hahn

Deb shared the International Relations Committee's (IRC) charge and provided an update on workplan items that have been accomplished in the past year. Although some actions continue to be delayed because of meeting postponements, several international forums continued as planned. Virtual subsidiary meetings and a meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group of the CBD were conducted. At the Open-Ended Working Group meeting, AFWA shared its recommendations on the First Draft of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). AFWA continued its engagement with the Advisory Committee on Subnational Governments and as a member of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) US National Committee's Executive Committee. A significant amount of time was spent engaging with partners (E.g, WWF, WCS, IUCN, CITES, federal partners, etc.) and in dialogues and webinars on wildlife trade, use and consumption and COVID/risks of future pandemics. AFWA submitted comments on the IPBES Sustainable Use of Wild Species Assessment and Summary for Policymakers. AFWA participated in the IUCN motions development and voting process through online consultations at the end of 2020. We also engaged with partners across the globe to prepare for and engage in the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) from September 3 through September 10, 2021. During the meeting we negotiated language on motions brought to the WCC and new and urgent motions proposed at the start of the WCC. A white paper was developed around restrictions on importation of specific species. Thirty-nine states have contributed over 3.2 million USD for on-the-ground conservation actions to support the conservation of state Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). The CITES Technical Work Group activities are summarized below and more details can be found in this [report](#). Please send any edits to the Work Plan by COB September 28th.

Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee: Travis Ripley

The Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee (CWDC) is composed of the wildlife directors and agency leads representing the jurisdictions/agencies (13 Provinces and Territories and Environment and Climate Change Canada, Parks Canada Agency, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada) with responsibility for wildlife conservation in Canada. Updates on both Provincial/territorial initiatives in addition to federal initiatives include the following.

Note: The Canadian Federal Election is underway and many committees of national scope, including CWDC, has had reduced meetings recently.

1. British Columbia's recent release of the "Together for Wildlife" Strategy is available [online](#) and was discussed at CWDC. The strategy and presentation highlighted shared learnings on different approaches to wildlife management in the context of work involving Indigenous Peoples.
2. Saskatchewan released updated Captive Rearing Regulations that highlights the work describing acceptable species within the Province
3. Canadian Wildlife Habitat Stamp: They are seeking opportunities to increase stamp pricing to assist with increased waterfowl and wildlife habitat conservation efforts across Canada.
4. IUCN Global Youth Summit: CWDC had the opportunity to hear about the involvement by young Canadians in the global wildlife program.
5. Bison (Wood Bison): The species is of increasing concern in more western and northern areas of Canada. The technical committee updated CWDC on the coordination of Bison work.
6. Agency Relevancy: CWDC hosted Director Tony Wasley to discuss the "Relevancy Roadmap" and discuss how the roadmap fits within the Canadian context. The session was to assist with determining whether the roadmap should be altered to support Provinces and Territories.
7. Nature Agenda (ECCC led program): CWDC supported materials that eventually culminated in a Ministers [meeting](#) discussing:
 - a. Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: The discussion focused on protected and conserved lands highlighting the importance of stewardship and recognizing further discussion on gaps in biodiversity outcomes and how best to address these.
 - b. Species at Risk Transformation: The continued focus is on priority species, priority places and priority sectors with an emphasis on multiple species protection or ecosystem/landscape protection where applicable. The discussions also highlighted continued national collaboration and coordination.
 - c. Governance: Discussed the need to view the committees that support the Conservation, Wildlife and Biodiversity portfolio to ensure committee structure (including the CWDC) remains relevant and efficient in delivering outcomes. Alberta and ECCC co-chair the governance review.

CITES Technical Work Group Update: Carolyn Caldwell, Buddy Baker, Mike Bednarski, Stewart Liley

The CITES Technical Work Group (Team) represented the state fish and wildlife agencies and where applicable the Provinces and Territories at the virtual meetings of the 73rd Standing Committee, the 31th Animals Committee, and the Joint meeting with the 25th Plants Committee, and on numerous CITES working groups. The Committees created working groups throughout 2020 and early 2021 to continue implementing the Convention while in-person meetings were not possible. Those working groups addressed the conservation and management of paddlefish, sharks, American ginseng, and corals. The Standing Committee discussed approximately 11 substantive agenda items with the most applicable item being implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Convention. The Animals Committee and Joint meeting with the Plants Committee agendas included approximately 31 substantive items including but not limited to: eels, coral, paddlefish, turtle conservation; captive bred and ranched specimens; and the CITES Strategic Vision.

Along with 32 other Parties and 31 other observer organizations, the Team is a member of the working group on the role of CITES in reducing risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade. The Team are also a member of the Labelling system for trade in caviar,

the Sharks and Rays, and the Trade in Aromatic and Medicinal Plants Working Groups. The Team was a member of the working groups on Eels and Precious Coral. For more details, see the [2021 CITES report](#).

Updates on International Meetings and Issues Including the Edinburgh Declaration: Deb Hahn

CITES: See the CITES Work Group summary and report for CITES activities.

GBF: Throughout the year, AFWA provided opportunities to states, Provinces, and Territories to provide input into the CBD's GBF. AFWA developed recommendations for the First Draft of the GBF for the Open-ended Working Group meeting from August 23rd through September 3rd. There were extensive recommended changes to the First Draft made at the meeting. AFWA intervened to share our recommendations and wording changes and provided our recommendations in writing. However, nothing was voted on or officially negotiated. They hope to have in person meetings in January 2022 to negotiate the final text of the GBF. AFWA will work with this Committee and our members to develop recommendations for these negotiations.

Edinburgh Declaration: The intent of the Declaration is to set out the aspirations and commitments of the wider subnational constituency of the CBD in delivering for nature over the coming decade. At the March Committee meeting, we had a good debate about whether AFWA should sign on to the Declaration. The Committee felt they needed two things before deciding. They wanted to know if the US State Department had concerns and wanted to see text of the GBF that was closer to being final to know what they would be supporting. The US State Department did not express concerns about AFWA signing on; however, we still do not have a near final GBF. We will hopefully have the information we need before the March 2022 Committee meeting to make a final decision.

IUCN: Since March we have coordinated with partners and prepared for the IUCN WCC. The WCC was held from September 3rd through September 10th. Of the motions brought to the WCC for negotiation, we did not have great concerns about their language and were supportive of some of them. Eleven new and urgent motions were announced during the meeting. Working with partners we reviewed these motions. We abstained on several that were not directly related to state, Provincial and Territorial expertise and work. However, AFWA had concerns about some wording in a couple of the motions. With our conservation partners that we communicated and engaged with throughout the Congress, we negotiated language in virtual meetings during the WCC. Because AFWA was not represented in person, Safari Club International Foundation held our proxy, which allowed us to vote on motions. The [Marseille Manifesto](#) was developed during the meeting and approved by acclamation at the close of the Congress.

Although many meetings and actions moved forward, as the pandemic continues to impact in person meetings, voting and negotiating continues to be controversial because of inclusivity and equity issues.

Interconnectivity of Conventions and Initiatives: Determining the Future of Sustainable Use: Shane Mahoney

The presentation focused on the global connectivity of conservation policy and pressures that bring distant influences to bear on options and practices for local, regional and national agendas. The result of this interconnectivity works in a countercurrent fashion as it means that we all can have influence on one another's agendas, and ultimately, help shape global agendas for nature conservation. We are both potential victims and potential influencers to a degree far greater than in previous eras. What is critical to understand is that we cannot act alone, in many instances. Having influence, however, requires that we and our perspectives find footing in established contexts, frameworks and processes. We cannot move independently but must work within these frameworks.

There are many critical entities that are well established in this arena but the most influential refer to United Nations relevant institutions, conventions and declarations. The critical ones referenced in this presentation include the CBD; Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES); CITES; Convention on Migratory Species (CMS); CPW; IUCN; and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Many individuals within AFWA are generally aware of these entities, some more so than others, and these are engaged variously. CITES is the best-known entity overall and much of our engagements with this convention are largely defensive and protective of exiting policy options. What we require is greater engagement with the various other processes as many of these enable more proactive positioning on matters of shared and global conservation concern. We can create the space we wish to occupy, rather than defend the space we have been allotted.

The presentation lead to a conversation about how to enhance AFWA's international engagement and potentially developing a strategy to consider how best to do this.

US Fish and Wildlife Service, International Affairs Report: Don Morgan

IUCN World Conservation Congress: Twenty-one US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) employees from throughout the U.S. took part virtually in the IUCN WCC. USFWS is an IUCN member agency and about 50 FWS employees are members of IUCN Specialist Groups. International Affairs (IA) submitted USFWS input as part of an interagency group of 8 federal agencies that reviews the IUCN motions. The US government had exhibit space at the in-person component of the Congress, which includes a poster demonstrating the work by the IA Program.

The Trilateral Committee: The United States hosted the 25th Trilateral and held it virtually for the first time in the meeting's history on May 17-20, 2021. Five key priorities emerged from this year's Trilateral to focus on from 2021 to 2024: Zoonotic Disease, Addressing Climate Change, Integrating Human Dimensions to Conservation, Technology Innovation for Conservation, and Diversity and Inclusion in Conservation.

Financial Assistance: In FY21, IA's Financial Assistance Program made significant progress. IA's Division of International Conservation published nine Notices of Funding Opportunity including three for rhinoceros and tigers, great apes, and Asian elephants. USFWS also published the first ever NOFO for Freshwater Turtles. In FY 21, IA issued over \$13.5 million dollars in financial assistance, including \$2.5 million in CARES Act funds that went to several Western Hemisphere Programs.

ePermits: Five FWS Programs (IT, ES, IA, MB, OLE) have been working intensely over the past year to develop a new online ePermitting platform. After the launch in October 2020 and the complete transition from the former SPITS system to ePermits, the work has continued to develop the system with the intent to reduce processing burden, provide data driven decisions, and uphold the public's trust in fulfilling our conservation mission. We continue to implement the new ePermits system through a series of releases, each of which will make available new functionality.

American Alligator proposed rule: USFWS received a petition dated December 9, 2019, from the State of Louisiana entitled, "Petition for Rulemaking to Correct the American Alligator Regulations at 50 C.F.R. § 17.42(a) Pertaining to the Sale of Hides" requesting that a provision of the 4(d) rule pertaining to the American alligator be amended or deleted to remove the requirement that sale or transfer of American alligator only be allowed "in accordance with the laws and regulations of . . . the State or Tribe in which the sale or transfer occurs." The USFWS has the responsibility to periodically update and clarify implementing regulations when it is necessary to do so. Thus, the USFWS published a proposed rule (Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Regulations Pertaining to the

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) (Proposed Rule) to amend the Alligator 4(d) rule on January 19, 2021 (86 FR 5112). The comment period on this proposed rule closed on March 22, 2021. 173 comments were received. While the USFWS is not permitted to provide any specific information about the status of the rulemaking process, the USFWS is currently working on this matter, including the draft environmental assessment, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, to determine whether this proposed rule will have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment.

CITES: The 74th meeting of the Standing Committee is scheduled to be held in March/April 2022, but additional information on location and format (in-person or virtual) has been provided yet. The Service will share relevant information with AFWA and USG interagency partners as we receive it. The US participated in virtual Animals, Plants, and Joint Technical Committee meetings. Between the meetings the US engaged in the 19 in-session working groups. On March 3, 2021, the USFWS published the first in its series of Federal Register Notices in preparation for CITES CoP19. The Notice invited the public to submit suggestions on possible agenda items, resolutions, and decisions the US should consider submitting for CoP19. The public comment period for this Notice closed on May 3, and the USFWS is currently evaluating the comments received in preparation for the next Federal Register Notice (in early 2022), that will outline our tentative positions (likely, undecided, or unlikely) on the public suggestions and based on internal discussions. The Service will be emailing the letter for the annual request for information on approved State's implementation of their CITES furbearer and American alligator export programs. Responses will be due on October 31, 2021.

Action Items / Resolutions / Motions

1. The Co-chairs will discuss the purpose of and whether and how to enhance AFWA's international engagement and potentially develop a strategy to consider how best to do this.
2. Develop a briefing document on the Edinburgh Declaration to share with members in March.
3. Share the one-pager about the intent and purpose of the International Relations Committee to better inform state agencies about the Committee.
4. Finalize the white paper on importation restrictions.

OTHER ITEMS MENTIONED:

The importance of engaging in the zoonotic disease discussions. They are being held in many forums. They will have impacts both positive and negative on sustainable use, consumption and trade in wildlife. PERC is on group that is actively involved. There is an [IPBES report](#) published last year that gives the current state of science regarding biodiversity and pandemics. Note the [Executive Summary](#) calls for a much more nuanced approach to wildlife trade and not complete bans as has been suggested in some forums.

Canada is collecting comments from Canadians on potential restrictions on the import of elephant ivory. These would be stricter domestic measures under CITES. The restrictions would apply to commercial and non-commercial trade and could include a ban on trophy imports and required import permits for other non-commercial imports, even Appendix II.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/convention-international-trade-endangered-species/publications/discussion-document-range-potential-actions-pertaining-trade-controls-ivory-canada.html>

Center for Biological Diversity and the Natural Resources Defense Council have petitioned the USFWS and the Center for Disease Control to stop all imports and exports, and also to stop all "transport" (under the Lacey Act) of mammals and birds, to reduce the risk of future pandemics. AWCP sent a letter that AFWA signed. AFWA is also developing a letter in response.

<https://www.nrdc.org/experts/elly-pepper/ban-us-trade-live-wild-birds-and-mammals-could-reduce-pandemic-risk>

NEW OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED:

Considering how to enhance AFWA's international engagement.

Submitted by Rick Jacobson and Travis Ripley

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