

**2019 Multistate Conservation Grant Program
Proposed National Conservation Needs**

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Proposed NCN 1

Improve benefits for fish, wildlife, and their habitats through Farm Bill implementation

Submitted by: Agricultural Conservation Committee

Statement of Need: The Farm Bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation for providing fish and wildlife habitat on millions of acres of privately owned and managed lands. With a new Farm Bill expected to be passed into law by 2019, the effective implementation of USDA conservation programs will rely heavily on the participation and engagement of State fish and wildlife agencies.

Desired Proposals: Proposals should address one or more of the following:

- Provide recommendations on how fish, wildlife, and their habitats can best be integrated into Farm Bill programs, rules, policies, and guidelines used to implement the laws.
- Work with State fish and wildlife agencies, NGOs, producers, USDA, USFWS, forestry, and others to optimize fish and wildlife benefits from Farm Bill programs, including, but not limited to, CRP, EQIP, CSP, ACEP, and RCPP.
- Expand Farm Bill programs to regions of the nation where they are currently under-utilized.
- Increase the capacity to deliver fish and wildlife expertise/technical assistance and educational outreach to current and potential Farm Bill program participants.
- Assess the economics, human dimensions, promotional strategies, fish and wildlife benefits, and/or hunter/angler recruitment/retention effects of Farm Bill programs, including the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program.
- Assess and improve the effectiveness of other conservation provisions, including conservation compliance and Sodsaver, on wildlife population and habitat trends.
- Facilitate information sharing of conservation program results to traditional and new audiences.
- Identify information needs and success stories that support strategic delivery of Farm Bill programs.
- Work with USDA to track Farm Bill-funded cover changes and investigate how programs and provisions have impacted native grassland and forestland habitat and its use by fish and wildlife, including pollinators.
- Identify and evaluate approaches to maintaining conservation benefits on expiring CRP acres, and increasing and retaining enrollment of high wildlife value CRP acres.
- Assess CRP mid-contract management activities and determine whether/how practice and program intent is being met across the country; evaluate the efficacy of incentives, cost share, or other methods that promote quality wildlife habitat.
- Increase engagement and involvement with the bioenergy industry to ensure the consideration of fish and wildlife needs in bioenergy development.
- Evaluate and increase the extent to which Farm Bill programs improve at-risk species conservation and decision-making.

Desired Outcomes: Successful proposals will improve Farm Bill benefits for fish, wildlife, and their habitats, and state fish and wildlife agencies' ability to manage their public trust resources.

Proposed NCN 2

Improve National Coordination and Conservation Partnerships Through the Development of a Fisheries Gray Literature Database.

Submitted by: American Fisheries Society/Science and Research Committee

Statement of Need: Thousands of in-house reports produced annually by State and Federal agencies, tribes, and NGOs remain undiscovered by most researchers and fisheries management biologists, primarily because the reports are not published and/or widely distributed outside the producing agency. The reports contain highly valuable information on management assessments, fisheries surveys, research projects, human dimensions studies, license and marketing efforts, and much more. Clearly, these “gray literature” reports contain highly relevant and useful data used by fisheries professionals, but there is no centralized database that collects and makes available these fisheries reports. In many cases, it is nearly impossible for working biologists in one state to access highly relevant information in adjacent states much less across the country. In a 2017 survey of fisheries professionals conducted by the American Fisheries Society (AFS), 94% of the 1,361 respondents indicated that a gray literature database would be either “Very Useful” (70%) or “Useful” (24%) to their work. This consolidated library of reports will also allow agencies and NGOs to respond more quickly and accurately to requests for information from the public regarding work conducted by agencies that would otherwise not be readily available through other standard searches of published materials.

Desired Proposals: Proposals submitted for this NCN should address the development and implementation of an online database of fisheries reports by AFS, which would include Sport Fish Restoration and other grant program performance reports.

Desired Outcomes/Expected Benefits: Implementation of an online fisheries gray literature database will enable fisheries scientists and professionals to effectively and easily search and retrieve thousands of Federal and State agency, non-governmental agency, and tribal reports of interest in one place. Users will be able to search the full text of a report, and further narrow their search by specifying author name, species, year of publication, geographical region, and state, for example. An RSS feed allowing users to automatically receive all new reports on a specific area of interest will be available. Additional benefits would include improved coordination of resources among fisheries agencies and Universities to meet conservation goals and objectives. AFS is working with Federal and State agencies (e.g., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife) who have agreed to permit AFS to co-host their current online reports. The proposed AFS database will be designed for easy submission of reports by agencies and organizations, and will be moderated to ensure that only appropriate submissions are posted.

This system, originally developed for fisheries material, is equally applicable to wildlife and related reports. The project proposal should include the capability, expertise and appropriate contacts to expand work to wildlife documents should such and expansion be requested.

AFS has begun discussions with fisheries professionals with database development expertise, and has begun work with our web consultant on possible design features of the proposed database. Approval of this NCN will allow AFS to start in-depth planning and design of the online gray literature database.

It is also anticipated that state agencies will need small but reasonable additional resources to identify reports and other documents that should be incorporated into this clearinghouse. This will require 1-2 months of primarily clerical or intern time to find reports (many may be historical), scan reports if not in electronic form, compile metadata as part of submission process and work through submittal to ensure completion. This should be addressed through small grants to state fish and wildlife agencies to support staff time to focus on this work load.

Proposed NCN 3

Grassland Conservation and Awareness: Enhance, Conserve, and Restore a Diminishing Ecosystem

Submitted by: Bird Conservation Committee; co-submitted by MAFWA Directors

Statement of Need: North America's grasslands include diverse ecosystems like the tallgrass, mixed-grass and shortgrass prairies, stretching from Canada through Texas; desert grasslands of southwestern United States and Mexico; hardwood and pine savannas of southeastern states; and agricultural hay and pasture/rangelands scattered throughout. These ecosystems have experienced persistent, long-term erosion in both quantity and quality. Such threats as agricultural intensification, invasive species, climate change, energy development, urbanization, aquifer depletion, urban water supply constraints, and other development, continue to take their toll. Based on World Wildlife Fund's 2017 Plowprint Report, 55 million grassland acres have been lost since 2009 in the Great Plains, leading to alarming declines in many grassland-dependent species (notably birds and pollinators, several of which are candidates for listing as threatened or endangered) and revealing an urgent need to raise awareness, develop strategies to stem the loss of our grassland ecosystems, and restore grassland functions as wildlife habitat. Since a significant proportion of our intact grasslands are privately owned, conservation efforts must involve local communities in design, implementation and evaluation of intended investments and outcomes.

Desired Proposals: Grant recipients would compete for Multi-state Conservation Grants (MSCG) to:

- Quantify recent changes to grassland ecosystems (loss to conversion, fragmentation and invasion); assess their condition, quality and distribution; and improve tools for remote sensing.
- Identify grassland habitat needs (acreage, condition, distribution, priority areas, etc.) and conservation tactics (enhancement, easements, restoration, etc.) to efficiently achieve goals and objectives of State Wildlife Action Plans, pollinator plans, and/or multi-state wildlife planning documents (e.g., national bird plans, joint venture plans, etc.).
- Create support systems (e.g. landowner cooperatives, inter-agency communication opportunities) to deliver grassland conservation on private and public land to improve ecological condition, restore natural processes, and prevent the decline of intact, healthy grasslands for the benefit of multiple species through Farm Bill programs, foundations, states and other funding entities.
- Develop ways to track and share conservation delivery efforts to measure the impact of programs and conservation plans on programmatic, bird population, habitat and human dimension objectives.
- Raise public awareness of the importance of healthy and diverse native grasslands, and coordinate and focus federal initiatives (including Farm Bill programs) to maximize impact and results.
- Fill in key knowledge gaps for grassland bird conservation, including fine scale distribution, habitat requirements, migratory connectivity, limiting factors, and population response to management and other impacts, such as ancillary benefits to pollinators.
- Increase understanding of human perceptions and decisions related to grassland management, conservation outcomes, and incentive efficacy, particularly regarding grazing lands.

Desired Outcomes: Desired outcomes of successful proposals would include:

- Expansion and improvement of effective and efficient grassland conservation programs and monitor impacts on both ecological functions and human well-being.
- Full implementation of existing strategic grassland conservation plans designed to support specific regional and national wildlife population goals, and development of new plans where needed.
- Increased public appreciation and support of functioning grassland ecosystems.
- Promotion and support of agricultural practices like holistic grass-based livestock grazing operations that sustain birds, pollinators and other species of concern.
- Advancement of science regarding limiting factors and management of healthy, diverse native grasslands for wild bird populations and multiple species benefits, including pollinators.

Proposed NCN 4

Incorporating Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Considerations into Energy Development

Submitted By: Energy and Wildlife Policy Committee

Statement of Need: Energy exploration, development and transmission are dominant influences affecting our nation's fish and wildlife resources. These energy-related activities will continue to cause major landscape disturbances as initiatives designed to increase renewable and traditional energy capacity are implemented to meet current and future energy needs in the United States. State fish and wildlife agencies are challenged in their ability to manage and conserve public trust resources in light of increased energy development on both public and private lands. Through a needs assessment conducted by AFWA, these agencies have identified and prioritized concerns with energy exploration, development and transmission (e.g. onshore and offshore wind, solar, onshore and offshore oil and gas, coal, etc.), effective communication and coordination with industry, federal agencies, other state agencies, tribes, and local governments, and in some cases limited state authority as factors affecting their ability to manage fish and wildlife resources. State fish and wildlife agencies are seeking assistance with facilitating integration of their resource concerns and authorities into industry decision-making considerations as well as federal, state, and local policies, processes and initiatives to maximize their ability to manage fish and wildlife resources. This NCN is intended to assist state fish and wildlife agencies in these efforts as well as provide support for the objectives in the AFWA Strategic Plan.

Desired Proposals: This NCN seeks proposals in the following areas:

- Incorporate considerations for fish and wildlife resources into decision-making processes regarding energy exploration, development and transmission on public and private lands; collaborate with industry to design and implement practices beneficial for fish and wildlife resources; explore and better understand the relationships between energy development practices and impacts on fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.
- Enhance and facilitate the communication between state fish and wildlife agencies, state and federal partners, tribes, local governments, industry and NGOs; provide training opportunities for state fish and wildlife agencies and partners to assist in understanding the energy regulatory processes and how fish and wildlife concerns can be better integrated into those processes.
- Facilitate the development of scientifically sound mitigation standards, conservation measures and related BMPs designed to avoid or minimize impacts associated with energy development on fish and wildlife resources.
- Increase the capacity of state fish and wildlife agencies to effectively address energy exploration, development and transmission issues; maximize authority for state fish and wildlife agencies to manage fish and wildlife resources.
- Facilitate the development of scientifically sound pre-construction risk assessments and post-construction morality studies that adhere to the principles of scientific integrity.

Desired Results//Expected Benefits: Successful proposals will provide improved coordination among state fish and wildlife agencies on decision making processes regarding energy exploration, development and transmission; provide state fish and wildlife agency personnel with the training and tools needed to effectively engage and communicate the priorities of fish and wildlife resources into those processes; improve working relationships among state fish and wildlife agencies, state and federal partners, tribes, local governments, academia, NGOs and industry while maximizing state authority for managing public trust resources.

Proposed NCN 5

Enabling State Fish and Wildlife Agencies to Coordinate and Implement Large Scale Conservation Initiatives

Submitted by: Executive Committee

Statement of Need: State fish and wildlife agencies are responsible for collectively addressing emerging national conservation issues to ensure they can continue to meet their management responsibilities and sustain the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Many agencies face barriers that impact their ability to collectively address national conservation issues and manage trust resources. For example, many state agencies face significantly curtailed funding for out of state travel that makes it impossible to meet these growing responsibilities.

Desired Proposals: Proposals will be considered that assist state agencies with the coordination and implementation of programs that address important conservation issues related to fish and wildlife management. Applicants must demonstrate they have a history of collaboration and the ability to coordinate work with all fifty state fish and wildlife agencies.

Desired Outcomes: Proposals funded under this NCN will enable national and regional coordination and provide states with technical, administrative and professional expertise and services. Detailed coordination objectives should be included along with an explanation of how these efforts will assist state agencies with their mission of fish and wildlife management.

Proposed NCN 6

Research for and Coordination of the 2021 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (National Survey)

Submitted By: Fish & Wildlife Trust Funds Committee

Statement of Need: The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation has been conducted every five years from 1955 through 2016 to measure participation and expenditures by residents in the United States. The quantification of participants and economic impacts of wildlife-based recreation is an important source of data used by Association members, other state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, and nongovernmental organizations and industry to assess trends in wildlife-related recreation. There is increasing interest among various stakeholders in generating the most accurate data possible for use in evaluative planning purposes as well. As part of the 2016 survey effort, an alternative methodology was explored to reduce future cost and increase the accuracy of these important estimates at the state level. One of the findings of this effort in 2016 specifically focused on the respondent burden as it impacted the quality of estimates derived from this survey. Also, the Association has identified a need to explore the possible incorporation of shooting sports and archery, not associated with hunting, into this survey effort. Therefore, a need was recognized to identify the essential information requirements of stakeholders using this survey in order to further reduce cost, lower the burden on respondents, decrease bias in the results, and increase precision of estimates.

Desired Proposals: Proposals submitted for this NCN will address either the 1) coordination or 2) research components of this project. While partnership funds are not required by the MSCGP, they are strongly encouraged. Proposals will be based upon the direction given by AFWA leadership in response to recommendations from the National Survey Technical Workgroup based on their analysis and that of an Independent Evaluation Team tasked with evaluating aspects of the 2016 National Survey.*

- 1) The coordination component of this effort will focus on two aspects as follows:
 - a. The first is for maintaining the National Survey Technical Workgroup's functions of overseeing this survey effort so that appropriate recommendations can be made to the Association. The responsibilities of the Workgroup will be to coordinate and collaborate with successful vendors of the research and coordination components of this NCN. The successful proposal will cover the needs of travel, facilitation, and advising for the Workgroup.
 - b. The other aspect of coordination focuses on technical support and maintaining data and reports of past National Surveys. This ensures that future survey efforts will have a historical basis for the National Survey and its use as well as technical support for helping guide future survey efforts and supporting storage of MSCGP reports. The successful proposal will cover the needs for this technical support and maintaining the storage of past National Survey data and reports as well as aiding with the research components listed below.
- 2) Under the research component, two separate elements are identified as follows:
 - a. The first research element focuses on development of statistical models for bridging the 2016 survey effort to previous National Surveys conducted since 1991. This bridging effort will focus on national as well as state-level results. The successful proposal will include: methodology for model development and validation, estimation of major results for each state as well as national estimates from 2016, which correspond to the 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011 surveys, and details concerning a comprehensive user handbook, including code that stakeholders can use to estimate their own results using the models developed under this portion of the NCN.
 - b. The second research element focuses on reducing the current response burden of units (respondents) selected to be surveyed. The successful proposal shall include: how stakeholders of the National Survey will be identified and consulted to ascertain the essential information needs (types of estimates) that will be derived from future survey efforts, outline the process for how essential information needs will be determined in collaboration and cooperation with the identified stakeholders, and the development of data of interest (potential questions) for gathering this information.

Desired Outcomes: The outcomes for this project would be the bridge of the 2016 survey with previous National Surveys, a revised and reduced set of goals, objectives and potential questionnaire lengths, and oversight and recommendations for future National Surveys that will contain less bias and higher precision, and as cost effectively as possible.

**Note: The final report from the independent evaluation team was not yet completed at the time this NCN was written.*

Proposed NCN 7

Strengthening Fish and Wildlife Health Capacity through the National Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative

Submitted by: the Fish and Wildlife Health Committee and Science and Research Committee

Statement of Need: The importance of maintaining healthy populations of fish and wildlife has long been recognized by fish and wildlife managers, and several disease issues are of growing concern to fish and wildlife, animal health, and public health professionals and the publics they serve. Significant diseases, such as chronic wasting disease, plague, viral hemorrhagic septicemia, hemorrhagic disease, white-nose syndrome, West Nile virus, whirling disease, bacterial coldwater disease, and others have been found in wild and farmed fish or wildlife populations in North America and can significantly and negatively affect public trust resources. Reservoirs of economically important diseases like bovine brucellosis and tuberculosis have inadvertently become established in native wildlife and threaten livestock industries regionally. Also of concern are foreign animal diseases, such as foot and mouth disease, which was eradicated in the U.S. decades ago, New World screwworms, which reappeared in the U.S. and killed endangered Key deer in 2016, and highly pathogenic avian influenza, which was found in wild birds in North America in December 2014 for the first time. Intentional or accidental introduction of these diseases is likely to negatively affect wildlife, domestic animal, or human populations and would require a coordinated multi-agency response.

In view of the increasing need for fish and wildlife managers to effectively address wildlife health and disease issues, the Association resolved in 2005 to develop and implement a National Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative, in cooperation with appropriate governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. Although national in scope, the Health Initiative will not mandate programs at the state, tribal, or local level. The goal of the initiative is to protect fish and wildlife health through the enhancement of capabilities of state fish and wildlife management agencies to prevent, detect, manage, research, and educate the public about disease issues.

This NCN is designed to assist fish and wildlife management agencies in all 50 states and addresses several goals and strategies identified in the Association's Strategic Plan including Goal 3: Coordinated Conservation Initiatives – Support National Outreach and Education Initiatives, and Goal 4: Member Support and Coordination-Support and facilitate education, participation, communication and leadership capacity among state, provincial and territorial agencies to enhance fish and wildlife conservation.

Proposals Solicited: Proposals are requested that facilitate implementation of the National Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative. Successful proposals should support the national initiative through the development of state expertise and capacity in fish and wildlife health, particularly in critically important areas such as disease detection, control, management, and prevention, as well as effective communications about disease and disease outbreaks.

Desired Outcomes: Desired outcomes will be the development and support of the National Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative, as well as progress toward the implementation of specific goals and objectives to enhance state agency capacity and response to current and emerging fish and wildlife disease issues.

Proposed NCN 8

Outdoor Heritage — Participation, recruitment, retention and reactivation in hunting, fishing, boating, and conservation-related recreational activities; enhanced relations among state fish and wildlife agencies and related industries.

Submitted by: AFWA Hunting & Shooting Sports Participation Committee

Statement of Need: Participation in outdoor- and conservation-related recreational activities is key to strengthening the ability of state fish and wildlife agencies to protect the nation's natural resources and preserve opportunities for future generations. Generally, participation rates in traditional outdoor recreational activities are on the decline, and this trend is expected to continue into the immediate future. The reasons for declining participation are varied and complex; however, all states recognize a need for action to stabilize or reverse this trend. Ramifications of declining participation include 1) a citizenry further disassociated from our conservation heritage, nature, and all related benefits, 2) a direct loss of funding to fish and wildlife conservation programs, and 3) detrimental effects on critical industries that support and are supported by hunting, recreational fishing, boating, and the shooting sports. Successful recruitment, retention, and reactivation efforts rely on maximizing crossover opportunities in outdoor recreation; developing partnerships to implement state, regional, and national programs; and sharing best practices and the financial and intellectual resources necessary to create needed innovations.

Desired Proposals: Proposals submitted under this NCN should address needs related to:

- 1) participation, recruitment, retention and reactivation of people in hunting, recreational fishing, boating, and the shooting sports,
- 2) ways to enhance industry and state agency relationships, and
- 3) building awareness of conservation funding by hunters and anglers, under the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, among students of conservation law and policy.

This NCN also takes into consideration outdoor activities with valuable crossover applications. For example, approximately 101 million Americans participated in wildlife-associated recreation activities in 2016, including 35.8 million who fished and 11.5 million who hunted. Proposals submitted under this NCN should address one or more of the following: a) innovative tools and actions that foster initiation, recruitment, and retention, including efforts to increase opportunities for target markets; b) partnerships and cooperation between or among successful recruitment/retention programs and related industries; c) new approaches to marketing that document and promote the social and economic benefits of hunting, fishing, boating, and related recreational activities; d) tools to assist hunting, fishing, and boating education instructors in communicating the history and role of hunters, anglers, and boaters in the conservation of North America's fish and wildlife; e) methods to assist state fish and wildlife agencies in assessing and meeting the demands for public shooting facilities, access to public waters for recreational fishing and boating, and public access to land for hunting; f) actions that help related recreational industries understand and enhance the important role they play in fish and wildlife conservation and promoting these benefits to the public at large; and g) efforts to evaluate the efficacy of recruitment and retention programs and strategies.

Desired Results/Expected Benefits: Desired results and expected benefits of proposals would be:

- 1) successfully implemented strategies that increase participation and retention rates in hunting, recreational fishing, boating, and shooting sports;
- 2) a steady and reliable source of revenue to state fish and wildlife agencies from license sales, registration fees, taxes, and associated federal aid;
- 3) national policies and programs to help recruit and retain participants;

- 4) continued long-term social and economic benefits through participation and increased recruitment of new hunters, anglers, boaters, and recreational shooters;
- 5) strategic guidance to state wildlife agencies to assist them in meeting demands in their state for public shooting facilities, boating and fishing access to public waters, and public access to land and public waters for hunting;
- 6) enhanced networking and understanding among agencies, related industries, and other committed partners;
- 7) identification of opportunities to maximize excise tax collected under the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program; and
- 8) an improved conservation ethic among outdoor recreational participants, and a more understanding and supportive public – all of which will help ensure a bright and sustainable future for our North American hunting, fishing, and boating heritage.

Proposed NCN 9

Coordination of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Authority to Manage Wildlife Resources in Concert with Federal Actions Required by International Treaties, Conventions, Partnerships, and Initiatives

Submitted by: The International Relations Committee

Statement of Need: Rules established under international treaties often impact state authority and how states manage fish and wildlife. Added regulations can result from restrictions adopted through international treaties such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). State tagging requirements for otters and bobcats stem from CITE actions in 1975. State agencies looking to ensure sustainable harvest of turtle species desired by international markets are updating turtle regulations. Active involvement in CITES has ensured that permits are not required for international movement of items such as wallets and garments. Without these provisions, it would be virtually impossible to travel abroad with alligator garments leading to catastrophic declines in sales in these sustainable use products.

These are examples that have significant implications to state's management authority. Additionally, migratory species that spend part of their life cycles in our states often spend more than half of each year outside the United States. Thus, conservation actions outside of the states influence the status of Species of Greatest Conservation Need within the states. It is necessary for states to be able to participate in international conservation initiatives and actions that affect our migratory species. Other initiatives and treaties including IUCN, CMS, CBD require membership and participation in order to positively affect sustainable use issues and promote state priorities.

Understanding issues and developing working relationships over a sustained period by the CITES Technical Work Group and AFWA are essential for effectively resolving issues and require routine engagement with international colleagues. The Work Group has a long-standing and positive working relationship with key international counterparts and any disruption would result in lessening of state agency influence in important forums. Working as a team is effective and makes it easier to maintain expertise in CITES and other international forum. It is also an asset in building and maintaining a rapport with the international community. It also allows the Work Group and AFWA to support the Canadian Provinces when needed. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in NGO participation (e.g., HSUS and the Animal Welfare Institute) to push a protectionist/no use approach in CITES, IUCN, etc. necessitating continued participation. Without funding, our combined expertise and coordinated approach to state participation in international forums would need to be paid for by the Regional Associations or other means.

Desired Proposals: Proposals submitted under this NCN should address one or more of the following needs— fund a representative from each Regional Association and AFWA to participate in international treaties, conventions, and associated meetings; allow AFWA to maintain memberships in international initiatives; and allow for state agency participation in international bird conservation partnerships and projects.

Desired Outcomes/Expected Benefits: Successful proposals will provide two or more of the following.

- 1) an efficient, effective approach for state agencies to have input into federal policy on international treaties,
- 2) a means whereby state agencies may be appraised of pending developments internationally and respond appropriately,
- 3) a streamlined approach to coordinating state responses to provide state input into federal and / or international policies, rules, and procedures,
- 4) a mechanism to provide biological and administrative information to assist the federal government in executing its international responsibilities,
- 5) support sustainable use principles in international arenas,
- 6) ensure AFWA and the states have a voice in international initiatives, and
- 7) ensure state agencies can participate in international bird conservation partnerships and projects.

Proposed NCN 10

Increase leadership capacity and agency effectiveness within state fish and wildlife agencies (SFWA) and the conservation community through leadership and professional development initiatives, training, consulting, and support of the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI).

Submitted by: Leadership and Professional Development Committee

Statement of Need: Significant loss of senior leadership across state fish and wildlife agencies continues to impact and put at risk the conservation community's future. Recent statistics reveal a turnover of 55 State Directors since 2010 affecting every state agency except for eleven. This staggering loss of leadership capacity, coupled with the challenges facing SFWA's to remain relevant, adapt to changing landscapes and constituencies, and/or secure funding – just to name a few—requires continued, ongoing, and focused leadership and professional development. In a 2015 survey by AFWA's Management Assistance Team, a 76% response rate identified succession planning, development of adaptive leadership capacity, and strategic planning/agency relevancy as priorities. This further supported a 2014 survey where an overwhelming 92.6% of those directors surveyed believed that “leadership and professional development programs would help agencies achieve their conservation mission” and stressed succession planning and the need to develop a greater capacity of strategic thinkers in their organizations as their top two critical needs.

Desired Proposals: Proposals submitted under this NCN should outline strategies to increase the leadership capacity of tomorrow's fish and wildlife leadership through programming that provides:

- 1) leadership development programming that can reach a significant portion of the nation's state fish and wildlife agencies;
- 2) leadership program development, delivery expertise, and staff support to maintain an elite-level leadership development program, *the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI)*, on a nationwide basis reaching governments, NGOs, conservation-oriented businesses and tribes;
- 3) knowledge, expertise, and consulting services to expand leadership capacity and developing workforce planning strategies;
- 4) programs and opportunities for state fish and wildlife agency staff to increase their capabilities for delivering leadership development to their employees.

Desired Outcomes / Expected Benefits: As agencies continue to experience high levels of employee retirement / turnover creating a void in leadership experience, this NCN's programs will increase leadership capacity of the majority of states through leadership series workshops, consulting, assessments, online and on demand training, webinars, and other tools including building rich networks among state, federal, tribal, provincial, NGO, and for-profit organizations in the conservation arena. Agency access to leadership and professional development services specifically tailored to the unique needs of state fish and wildlife agencies will also be a critical tool to help them develop their own internal leadership development programs. During this grant the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) will graduate its 13th cohort of Fellows and the 14th cohort will be in mid-program. By the end of this grant cycle the NCLI will have an accumulated cadre of almost 500 Fellows across the spectrum of conservation – creating a powerful professional network of graduates to effectively lead fish and wildlife conservation work through the challenging and unpredictable future.

Proposed NCN 11

Sustaining the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and the Public Trust Doctrine through Outreach to Law Schools, and Reviewing and Communicating to State Agency Members New Developments in Conservation Law and Policy

Submitted by: AFWA Legal Committee

Statement of Need: Conduct legal research; monitor the progress of court cases, statutes, and regulations involving State agencies' management of fish and wildlife resources and their habitats in accordance with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Desired Proposals: Proposals will be considered that would:

- Assist AFWA in developing and offering wildlife law courses at law schools across the United States, as well as coordinating with state bar associations and law schools to provide clinical and occupational learning opportunities for law students.
- Assist AFWA in developing symposia and continuing legal education (CLE) seminars for practitioners and observers of wildlife law, or educational programming (e.g., mock trials, moot courts) for students of wildlife law.
- Broaden members' and partners' understanding of State wildlife management and jurisdictional issues through online platforms and in-person forums.
- Collaborate with conservation stakeholders (e.g., renewable energy firms, outdoors companies, landowners' organizations) to build legal frameworks for State agency participation in areas of law relevant to conservation.
- Convene groups of experts to review developments in conservation law and policy, at AFWA's recommendation.
- Encourage State agency coordination in responding to Federal agency decision-making (e.g., rulemaking, departmental guidance).
- Enhance relationships and pre-regulatory information-sharing between State and Federal agencies, including between legal counsel.
- Facilitate use of the best available fish and wildlife scientific data in State agency management actions and policy-making.
- Improve processes for, and increase State involvement in, evaluating and responding to Federal budget priorities relevant to State wildlife conservation.
- Otherwise conduct legal research to facilitate State management of fish and wildlife resources in accordance with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and the principles of cooperative federalism.

Desired Outcomes / Expected Benefits: A proposal funded under this NCN would:

- Assist AFWA and State agency legal advisors in performing review of, and coordinated response to, legal issues involving State wildlife management.
- Provide legal education and updates to law students, judges, and practitioners to enhance the wildlife law community's understanding of State wildlife conservation.
- Clarify the effects of statutes setting forth fish and wildlife management within State borders, and promote State, provincial, territorial, and Federal agency understanding of jurisdictional issues.

Proposed NCN 12

Multistate Conservation Grant Program Coordination

Submitted by: National Grants Committee

Statement of Need: The Multistate Conservation Grant Program was established in 2000 by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Improvement Act of 2000 (Improvement Act), which amended the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act. The Improvement Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to make up to \$6,000,000 available each calendar year under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal Assistance Program to fund Multistate Conservation Grants (CFDA Number 15-628). These grants may be awarded by the Secretary of the Interior only for projects identified on a priority list of wildlife or sport fish restoration projects submitted by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies by the mandated October 1 deadline. To ensure MSCGP funds are used to address important concerns of state fish and wildlife agencies, the Association has developed detailed requirements for the grant program applicants. The Act that established the MSCGP did not provide administrative funds for the Association to use for administration and implementation of its responsibilities. In 2017, the Association was awarded a Multistate Conservation Grant that currently supports the Multistate Conservation Grant Program Coordinator responsible for implementing the grant program, which expires December 31, 2018.

Desired Proposals: The Multistate Conservation Grant Program Manager will continue to coordinate with Association Committees and interested NGOs regarding the solicitation of NCNs and proposals, review of proposals, and selection of priority projects.

The Manager is responsible for

- Disseminating information and responding to inquiries about the grant program.
- Ensuring that the Association's responsibilities for executing the grant program are met and for managing the resultant Multistate Conservation Grants administered by the Association.
- Continuous improvement of the program's processes as well as ensuring effective evaluation and communication of the accomplishments of the MSCGP to State Fish and Wildlife agencies.

Desired Outcomes: This project will:

- Enable the Association to meet its responsibilities under the Act, and ensure grant funds are used for projects that provide maximum benefits to state fish and wildlife agencies and the wildlife resources they manage.
- Provide accomplishments and results of the program to the State Fish and Wildlife agencies and other applicable audiences.
- Provide necessary resources to the Association for the administration and coordination of the Multi-State Conservation Grant program, which is cooperatively administered with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Proposed NCN 13

Broadening Conservation Partnerships through the National Fish Habitat Partnership

Submitted by: Fisheries and Water Resources Policy Committee / Ocean Resources Policy Committee

Statement of Need: The National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) seeks to arrest and reverse declines in the quality and quantity of our nation's fish habitat in freshwater, estuarine, and marine waters through voluntary partnerships throughout the United States (www.fishhabitat.org). NFHP is identified as an Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) priority. The NFHP is comprised of 20 Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs) based on fish species, landscapes or habitat types. FHPs develop and implement landscape-scale approaches to protect, restore, and enhance priority fish habitats, both natural and manmade, across the United States. All 50 states are engaged in one or more of the FHPs. The conservation practices of the umbrella National Fish Habitat Partnership and FHPs are guided by the framework set forth in the 2nd Edition of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (2012) and by the National Fish Habitat Board (Board) which includes AFWA and representatives from the four regional associations and the Chair of the Board, who holds an at-large seat representing a state fish & wildlife agency. FHPs implement on-the-ground conservation activities that complement and strengthen efforts to conserve fish habitat by coordinating closely with local, regional, and national fisheries programs and priorities. The Multi-state Conservation Grant Program enables FHPs to leverage other federal, state, and private resources to fully implement the priorities of the Board and the FHPs. Grant resources support FHPs, Board and other committees under the Board, including the Science and Data Committee by providing funds to:

- improve ecological condition, restore natural processes, or prevent the decline of intact and healthy systems leading to better fish habitat conditions and better recreational fishing opportunities.
- raise public awareness of the importance of healthy fish habitats and communicate conservation outcomes.
- coordinate with federal initiatives to maximize impact and results.
- track and ensure projects are consistent with national conservation initiatives for fish species.
- improve the National Fish Habitat Assessment, and increase coordination between Fish Habitat Assessments being implemented through the NFHP.

Desired Proposals: Grant recipients would compete for Multi-state Conservation Grants (MSCG) to:

- promote strategic fish habitat conservation through regionally-and nationally coordinated science and conservation efforts by building upon previous MSCGs.
- assist FHPs with development, growth, organizational capacity and management.
- improve FHP capabilities to implement habitat assessments and habitat-related projects to identify priority watersheds.
- improve science based tools to meet fish conservation goals and objectives.
- compile socio-economic (recreational, commercial, subsistence and other) benefits associated with FHP projects.
- communicate habitat improvement efforts to the greater fisheries community and to the Board, FHPs, state fish chiefs, AFWA Fisheries and Water Resources Policy and Ocean Resources Policy Committees and the National Fish Habitat Fund on fisheries issues affecting state fish and wildlife agencies.

Desired Outcomes: Desired outcomes of successful proposals would include:

- increased effective and efficient science based conservation actions coordinated by and among FHPs.
- development of improved FHP coordination, strategic planning, and partnership management.
- improved FHP coordination and data collection for the 2020 National Fish Habitat Assessment.

- increased funding for FHP-sponsored conservation projects.
- increased and improved scientific capacity of FHPs and NFHP Science and Data Committee to implement conservation actions consistent with NFHP Action Plan objectives.
- increased capacity to engage new partners for FHPs and the Board.
- increased awareness and support for fish habitat conservation across the US.
- improved angling opportunities through the conservation, rehabilitation and improvement of fish habitat.
- increased coordination on marine-related FHP projects that advance collaboration among partners.

Proposed NCN 14

Supporting Wild Furbearer Management and Conservation through a Contemporary and Comprehensive Approach

Submitted by: Sustainable Use of Wildlife Committee

Statement of Need: State management authority of furbearers has become increasingly challenged, and management and policy decisions increasingly scrutinized, by both external and internal sources in recent years. To ensure that regulated trapping and furbearer management are sustained and improved in the U.S. it is critical to provide current and future wildlife professionals with the proper tools and information to effectively address these challenges. Legal challenges, effective communication and public understanding of management decisions and programs, staff awareness and training on scientific issues and communications, and enhancing public participation in wildlife-based activities are all challenges that face state and federal agencies.

Desired Proposals: Proposals submitted for this NCN will be expected to focus on developing and implementing a comprehensive and contemporary approach that benefits state management and state-led conservation of wildlife, especially furbearers (of which there are over twenty-five species, some of which are endangered). This should include overall communications needs, such as understanding furbearer management issues, communicating about Best Management Practices for Trapping, describing contemporary science-based management and research practices, facilitating dissemination of and access to relevant information, and highlighting furbearer management authority under the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Engagement of the public to participate in wildlife based outdoor activities is also relevant. Proposals should broadly address current challenges; for example, constant litigation by animal rights groups that challenge federal delisting of furbearing species (e.g., Canada lynx, gray wolf) that no longer warrant ESA protection, and therefore unnecessarily delay return of those species to state management authority; litigation by animal rights groups to attempt to stop legal exportation of pelts of CITES Appendix II species (e.g., bobcat, gray wolf, river otter); state-specific ballot initiative efforts by animal rights groups to prohibit trapping; and conflicts between state and federal agencies over management authority (e.g., Mexican wolf, red wolf). Engagement and promotion of management techniques such as Best Management Practices for Trapping, engaging professional development in communications regarding controversial management issues and understanding of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Applicants must have knowledge and experience in state furbearer management, research, communications, and conservation issues and topics; experience collaborating and coordinating with multiple state fish and wildlife agencies; and must demonstrate the ability to work with federal agencies (e.g., USFWS, USDA APHIS), hunting and trapping organizations, wildlife damage management organizations, and other agencies and NGOs.

Desired Outcomes/Expected Benefits: The desired outcome for this project is/are product(s) and publications that support science-based management and conservation of furbearers through a contemporary and comprehensive collective of information, increased or more efficient access to often difficult-to-find furbearer-related materials, and increased awareness of the technical aspects of trapping within the wildlife profession, enhanced training and competency of professional staff to promote and explain agency programs. Expected benefits include management and policy support for all state fish and wildlife agencies to make decisions related to wildlife resources and help ensure state management authority and that legal and appropriate utilization of wildlife by the public, and methods of take re: trapping and furbearer management are sustained in the face of increasing challenges. Further benefits may include an increase in efficacy of furbearer management and conservation efforts through facilitating partnerships among agencies, policy makers, stakeholders, and NGOs, and to build national and international partnerships to address these issues.

Proposed NCN 15

Standardizing the Harvest Information Program (HIP) to unify methodologies by state wildlife agencies.

Submitted by: AFWA Technology and Data Committee, co-submitted by WAFWA

Statement of Need: HIP was fully implemented in 1998 as a cooperative state-federal program to annually obtain a national list of migratory game bird hunters. That list provides the sampling frame to estimate harvest of ducks, geese, mourning doves, band-tailed pigeons, woodcock, snipe, coot, rail, gallinules, and sandhill cranes across the U.S. All state fish and wildlife agencies (except Hawaii) collect HIP registration information from each migratory game bird hunter, compile all registrations, and forward them to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) throughout the hunting season. The USFWS uses this sampling frame to conduct annual surveys via mailings and provide estimates of hunting activity and harvest.

Problems with current sampling methods have resulted in increased HIP survey costs and decreased utility of hunter and population estimates. Issues contributing to these inaccuracies and inefficiencies include:

- 1) a sample frame that is both inflated by the inclusion of individuals that do not hunt migratory game birds, but also does not include all migratory game bird hunters;
- 2) late data submissions that yield incomplete annual sample frames; and
- 3) incorrectly formatted or coded data that has at times yielded dramatically inaccurate harvest estimates.

In 2017, the AFWA Directors endorsed a proposal to pilot a voluntary, national program to administer HIP through a single, standardized source, while remaining state controlled. This pilot would provide a proof of concept and address questions or concerns about moving to a national HIP system.

Desired Proposals: Proposals submitted under this NCN should support the development of a national HIP pilot by:

- 1) Developing technology and infrastructure that allows hunters to purchase and/or acquire their registration through a single vendor service;
- 2) Developing a user interface that allows individual states to maintain their branding associated with the program and their agency;
- 3) Providing a scalable approach that will allow additional states to join the program over time.
- 4) Addressing concerns about data security.

Desired Outcomes / Expected Benefits: A standardized, voluntary, national program for HIP could reduce workloads, eliminate unnecessary steps in data collection and submission, provide long-term cost savings to both state fish and wildlife agencies and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), ensure a consistent format across states, and eliminate third-party license vendors from data collection. Collecting more accurate data at lower costs would allow better estimates of hunter numbers and harvest and could improve migratory bird management decisions.