



Wildlife Diversity Conservation and Funding Committee Report

Chair: Sara Parker Pauley, Missouri Department of Conservation

Vice-chair: Jonathan Regosin, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

Meeting on September 2022

112th AFWA Annual Meeting

Fort Worth, Texas

Committee Charge: *Advocate for long-term dedicated funding and annual appropriations for the conservation of species of greatest conservation need, nature-based recreation and conservation education and support development, implementation and revision of State Wildlife Action Plans.*

Meeting Participants: Approximately 80 individuals attended the meeting.

Elsa Haubold, FWS; Daniel Eichinger, MI DNR; Melisa Tucker, FWC; Chelsea Acres TPWD; Jonah Evans, TPWD; Kelly Simon, TPWD, Richard Heilbrun, TPWD; Karen Kinkead, IA DNR; John Kanter, NWF; Allison Fowler, AGFC; Sean Saville, AFWA, Rex Sallabanks, IDFG; Jen Newmark, NDOW, Jenny Dickson, CT DEEP; Kendra Wecker, OH DNR; Sara Schweitzer, NCWRC; Rachael Hoch, NCWRC; Kathy Hollar, FWS; Thomas Eason, FWC; JJ Apodaca, ARC; Cory Chandler, TPWD; Sean Kelly, USVI-DFW; Robert Owen, TPWD; Eric Edgley, UDOW; Leanne Burns, AFWA; Josh Avey, AGFD; Carter Smith, TPWD; Stephanie Herman, Timmons Group; Rebeca Quinonez Pinon, NWF; Ross Winton, TPWD; Nathan Fuller, TPWD; Keven Mayes, TPWD; Melissa Felty, TPWD; Lisa Bragg, Southwick Assoc.; Jennifer Malpas, USGS; Sherri Russell, MDOC; Lorisa Smith, MDOC, Mylea Bayless, BCI; Shelly Plante, TPWD; Deniz Aygen, IDFG; Diane Brusoe, WI DNR; Scott Hull, WI DNR; Corina Newsome, NWF; Jon Ambrose, Georgia DNR; Diana Swan-Pinion, FWS; Jennifer Cipolletti, ABC; Leslie Hay, USFS; Deb Rocque, FWS; Elroy Masters, BLM; Brad Jost, BLM; John Rogner, IL DNR; Mark Humpert, AFWA; Sara Parker Pauley, MDOC + 27 virtual participants

Scheduled Discussion Items

The meeting was convened by Sara Parker Pauley at 9:15am. Sara reviewed the agenda and asked for approval of the notes from the last meeting. Jenny Dickson motioned to approve the meeting notes and Rex Sallabanks seconded. The report was approved.

Diversity Equity Inclusion

Sara Parker Pauley-We started this conversation in March, I hope DEI can become a standing committee. Why is DEI an important topic for this committee?

Jenny Dickson-It is Important to recognize that committee representatives represent a myriad of perspectives. We need to draw in new people and let them see there is something for everyone. When RAWA arrives, match will become important. We need to reach out to more partners.

Jen Newmark-This group has already recognized the importance of a diverse work force. This committee's thinking will help us do conservation better. It will help us connect with people better and increase relevancy. Diversity in all its forms is really important.

Melissa Tucker-We miss fewer things if we have diversity, and we will miss opportunities without diversity.

Sara Parker Pauley-What is the description.

Jen Newmark-We don't know what we are missing until someone tells us. Intergenerational is important. We need other people to help us meet broader conservation goals. Conservation will be more successful if we are more engaged. Everyone should see conservation as part of what they do. How do we build relationships and community.

John Kanter-This room is not representative, there has been a lot of past mistakes. What better time than now to undo some damage.

Kelly Simon-Game species have advocates and wildlife diversity needs advocates. If it's not us, then maybe someone else will take the space.

Sara Parker Pauley-What can we do to incorporate DEI into this committee?

Caroline Murphy-Has there been a discussion about broadening membership of committees.

Sara Parker Pauley-We want this to lead to change.

Jonah Evans-People who apply for jobs are not diverse.

Sara Parker Pauley-Should we allow folks from other organizations to be members? NGOs could help us see a different point of view.

Nate Fuller-This needs to be deeper into agency recruitment. Bat Conservation International is doing a program "I'm a biologist". That type of outreach is important. Maybe we could profile biologists.

Elsa Haubold-We've been sitting in this room for years. Can we start bringing in more diversity such as NCLI graduates.

Nate-Can we take lessons from the plenary and apply it to this process?

Elsa Haubold-It's expensive to do a hybrid option. How do we get people involved that can't travel?

Jen Newmark-Being a welcoming place is important. The layout of the room can be intimidating. Can we use mentors to tell people how things work. We should state that everyone has something to contribute, give space and opportunity.

Naomi Edelson-One specific thing is to work more with local municipalities and parks. They have a leg up because they have more diverse communities. This is not the traditional work of state fish and wildlife agencies. I encourage you to reach out to your municipality and work with them on RAWA.

Carter Smith-State Fish and Wildlife Agencies should work with Parks, that is low hanging fruit. Involve your parks agency in conservation and recreation. That's a terrific idea from Naomi and it's a quick way to work on diversity.

Jenny Dickson-It's comfortable to say we need to grow the next generation that does not look like us. Maybe these folks are out there, we are just not looking in the right place to invite them into our work, we are not connecting them.

Elsa Haubold-Tribes often don't know about our meeting or are invited when we meet in their area.

Jonah Evans-Some job descriptions have course level requirements that are barriers.

Shelley Plante-Registration costs can be a barrier to broader audiences. Could we offer scholarships? Diverse voices hear that we need them and then we charge them to attend. There is a huge disconnect.

Sara Parker Pauley-Before next spring's meeting, what is one thing the committee will commit to doing?

Elroy Masters-The committee has taken on too broad of an issue. What part of DEI will we take on? At the next meeting let's figure out the specifics.

Sara Parker Pauley-We can form a small group.

Caroline Murphy-Do we want to do a resolution? What is the pipeline? Feels like the conversation is occurring over and over again.

Jen Newmark-We are pushing for these conversations. Getting the conversation started was key. We can see a better fit with this committee. Other committees may struggle. How the conversation goes will dictate the next steps.

Sara Parker Pauley-Any committee can offer a resolution.

Karen Kinhead-I like the idea of a work group. Maybe states driving to a meeting could invite tribes to ride along.

Sara Parker Pauley-Is there interest in a group developing recommendations? Let Mark know if you are interested in helping. Note: Karen Kinhead, Rebeca Quinones, Jen Newmark, and Melissa Tucker agreed to help.

State and Tribal Wildlife Grants

Mark Humpert-The Administration's request for FY2023 was \$82.4 million, a 13% increase over FY2022. The House of Representatives recommended a 2% increase and the Senate a 5% increase. Over 200 members of the House and Senate signed Dear Colleague Letters supporting funding for the program. Congress is not expected to pass a final budget before the end of the fiscal year.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act

Sara Parker Pauley-Dave Chanda reminded us that this has been a very long-haul that dates back to Naomi's work at AFWA with Teaming With Wildlife and CARA. Lots of people have been part of this effort to secure funding. Thank you, Carter Smith, for your leadership and for working so hard on this over the years. We are here because of you.

Carter Smith-Thank you for that. I was reflecting on this rich history. Change starts here. This is happening because of the persistence of people in this room and wildlife diversity leaders. Keep foraging ahead, this is how you affect change. It has been extraordinary to be a part of this. We created an

environment to lead from the bottom up. So many have made passing RAWA their own cause. Thank you, Sara, for your great leadership, you've been an ambassador for us, making those trips to DC. Texas has shown examples of success. We hired staff six years ago to kickoff passage of RAWA and now we are close to the finish line.

Sean Saville-There was a series of meetings last week. Sara and Dan met with Senators Blunt and Heinrich. Meetings were also held with Senator Tillis and industry and conservation leaders. The outcome from these meetings was that there is a short-term opportunity to attach RAWA to a continuing resolution before the end of the month. Senators Heinrich, Blunt, and Tillis have been important to this. This is the pre-midterm path forward. We were able to get the meeting because of a strong push and touches to Senate offices, field tours, and fact sheets. We created a drumbeat that there is broad support. Polling by Responsive Management was very helpful, it showed 70% support for RAWA. Additional polling showed some of highest support ever seen for an issue like this. There is a payfor, but we need to keep close hold for now. In the next day or two we expect to see language that will go through review and scoring and we should see that by the end of the week. Key members of the Senate Finance Committee have agreed to the payfor. There will need to be a policy review, legal view, legislative counsel review and then we will send the language around by the end of the week. We could have a vote as early as Monday in one chamber or another.

Jonah Evans-Can you clarify the chamber?

Sean Saville-The Senate will probably go first.

Richard Heilbrun-When will we be told about the payfor, when can we communicate that?

Elsa Haubold-What was the polling number?

Sara Parker Pauley-RAWA was added to a poll and it showed 86% support, the second highest number ever. The highest was for veterans' benefits.

Nate Fuller-Why does a CR approach have this much support?

Sara Parker Pauley-It has to do with what vehicles are available.

Sean Saville-There could be other options later.

Sara-Colin O'Mara said there is ample opportunity. After midterms other things could come into play.

Mike Leahy-Outreach to the Senate is important. Keep up the message that you support RAWA. The decision about whether to include RAWA in a continuing resolution is in the hands of a small number of people. We have Senators Wyden and Crapo on board. Outreach to anyone in Congress is helpful. Leaders of the Senate and anyone up for election are targets, those with tight races are important. Ask those members to talk to Senate leadership. We also can't take democrats for granted. Highlight how close we are. There is always interest in keeping the continuing resolution clean. If that doesn't pan out, we have other options.

John Kanter-A shout out to the National Wildlife Federation, Colin, Mike, Abby, and Lacy. They have been working on this every day.

Sara Parker Pauley-I don't know when Colin sleeps? He is amazing and we would not be where we are without him. The Congressional Sportsman's Foundation has also worked hard.

Becky Gwynn-Can you share the polling data from Responsive Management and the other poll.

Sara Parker Pauley-Communicate now. We can't do too much outreach now. We could use a touchpoint every day. We are waiting on continuing resolution language.

Sean Saville-Reporters are banging on our doors. If RAWA is included in the continuing resolution, the bill stays the same.

Naomi Edelson-Politics is about persistence. Wildlife and people will benefit. Share a few things we are doing. Goal is to get 60 votes in the Senate. We are not making assumptions. We did print and digital adds to democrats and republicans. DU, PF, CSF, and TNC helped with the ads. We've been working with affiliates to help get Senator Crapo to a better spot. We did media, op-eds, interviews and created a drumbeat. We did lots of social media and showed examples of success and that there is hope. Years of work are seeing a payoff. Videos can help too. We are changing action alerts from support to vote for Recovering. We will be doing phone banking in 50 states when the vote is scheduled. We hope there will be a press event on Capitol Hill. We will activate all networks. We would like to host a Senate virtual rally to talk about the bill. We don't think there will be a vote on Monday. I ask all of you to make a short video about the bill. Tell people to contact their Senate and House members. The theme is 'Hope'. Mark has sent out links to our videos, channel your extrovert and be an ambassador. Keep it short. I want to see commitments. Sara, thank you for your tireless work.

Kathy Hollar-The FWS wants to support the states and help get the funding to the states quickly and not leave money on the table. We have great success stories. We will do everything we can at WSFR to help the states. We have been working on work force planning, developing guidance to help states add plants to their SWAP using the minor revision process, and came out with provisional apportionments thanks to AFWAs help. We appreciate the states who reviewed the apportionments spreadsheet. We established an executive leadership team to develop consensus on RAWA implementation. We identified joint areas for responsibility and provided a forum for coordination. Sara serves on the team with Tony, Martha, Deb, Tim, Gary, Brian, Amy, Robert, Collin, Ron and Kathy. One of the focus areas is the innovation grant program, the 3-year plan and report, and high-level policy direction. At the next meeting we will decide what to work on first. The RAWA Readiness Interim Guidance Team is working to stand up guidance on RAWA. A state board was established to review and edit draft guidance. The guidance will be considered draft until RAWA passes then will be reviewed again based on final wording in the ACT. Formal policy for RAWA will be developed through the Joint Task Force's protocol. We will not circulate guidance until RAWA is ready. We will then turn into policy with the Joint Task Force. When RAWA passes, it will take 3-4 months for the FWS to implement. It will take time to set up accounts and budget mechanisms and then FWS-WSFR will release final apportionments. We will check for changes in threatened and endangered species listings and will set up in Grant Solutions. We will publish the funding opportunity announcement and then states can start working with their regions on potential projects.

Elsa Haubold-FWS-WSFR will not be responsible for administration of tribal funds.

Kathy Hollar-It will take time to develop a formula for tribal apportionments.

Naomi Edelson-That was done at the request of tribes.

Sean Saville-Thanks to FWS-WSFR for your work and making time to keep us updated.

Kathy Hollar-We have been working on Justice 40 data request for State & Tribal Wildlife Grants. Justice 40 is a priority for the Department of Interior. A goal was set that 40 percent of federal investment will flow to disadvantaged communities (i.e. high unemployment, segregation, disproportionate impact from climate change and other factors). The EPA had developed a database where disadvantaged communities are located. The State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program was designated as a covered program. We can't tell states and tribes where to spend money and don't have a reporting system. What portion of State and Tribal Wildlife Grants funding have protected disadvantaged communities from flooding, protect water supplies, or other climate related benefits?

Sara Parker Pauley-To clarify, Justice 40 does not apply to Pittman-Robertson and Dingle-Johnson funds.

Kathy Hollar-Yes, these programs are not included in Justice 40.

Allison Fowler-Could we include a field in TRACS on Justice 40?

Corina Newsome-Would RAWA be covered under Justice 40?

Kathy Hollar-We don't know. A small percentage of projects met J40. Paul VanRyzin said about 30% of projects. Virgin Islands and territories are included too.

Kathy Hollar-We will get back to you on that.

Shelley Plante-The Joint Task Force is helping with RAWA fact sheets. This year we filled in some gaps and did a story map. If RAWA passes, do we still need the work group? There will continue to be a need to tell stories. We need better participation from the EOD committee. We will need to have a larger conversation at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference.

Fish and Wildlife Relevancy

Elsa Haubold-The second recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Panel was about relevancy. We developed a Relevancy Roadmap and the multistate conservation grant program awarded grants to implement the roadmap. Mark Duda did a workshop last week that highlighted work that is being done by the states on relevancy. The Wildlife Professional did a series of articles on relevancy. The coffee talk series is working on DEI. Nevada and Missouri have hired relevancy coordinators. The National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs requires reading of Relevancy Roadmap for their training. We should consider relevancy when RAWA passes.

Corina Newsome-When you have an influx of money, there has to be a lot of intentionality. We should develop a percentage of funds to work on justice issues.

Sara Parker Pauley-We can discuss this at the Executive Leadership team and make a recommendation.

Jen Newmark-States will be revising their SWAPs. When we revised ours in Nevada, we connected to the Relevancy Roadmap. SWAP revision provides an opportunity to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and relevancy.

Rebeca Quinones-Let's acknowledge we are still learning how to incorporate this into conservation programs. The first step is to acknowledge that we need to be more inclusive. It's an important issue that we need to address.

Sara Parker Pauley-I agree we need a plan in place.

State Wildlife Action Plans

Jacob Blandford-The original guidance on State Wildlife Action Plans and Climate Adaptation was published in 2009. It was a great document and a survey showed 80% of states had used it to incorporate adaptation into their SWAP. There is a need for updated guidance. Forty-three states will be updating their SWAPs by 2025. Updating the guidance was identified in a survey as a priority in 2020. With passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, there is more opportunity to address climate change. A joint workgroup between this committee and the Climate Adaptation Committee was set up to revise the guidance. We met our goal of completing the guidance by September 2022. We had a great team that met weekly and spent much time writing. The work group included representatives state and federal agencies, indigenous groups, and NGOs. State Fish wildlife agencies are the principle end users. When there was disagreement within the work group, we deferred back to the states. We asked the states what would be feasible. The guidance was sent out for review to state Wildlife Diversity Program Managers and State Wildlife Action Plan coordinators. The guidance has four chapters. It has a how-to-use guide. The guidance includes seven principles for incorporating climate change into SWAP. Each of the eight required elements was addressed in the document. In chapter four we expanded the number of resource topics. The climate adaptation committee voted to approve yesterday. The document includes mostly text. Design and layout will be done in-house by AFWA once approved. The guidance has broader applications beyond SWAP.

Mark Humpert-We would like to thank Jason Goldberg of the FWS for leading this project during his detail at AFWA.

Becky Gwynn-I move to adopt the new guidance, seconded by Karen Kinkead. The motion was adopted.

John Kanter-I've been working to support implementation of the State Wildlife Action Plan and Landscape Conservation Framework. The National Wildlife Federation is partnering with AFWA with support from USGS. Corina Newsome has been a collaborator. State Wildlife Action Plans are landscape conservation plans and by stitching them together we can scale them up. Consistency is needed to scale up. Our two objectives are to support regional collaboration on SWAPs and identify needs to improve the USGS SGCN database. Seventy percent of states had not used the SGCN database. Our recommendations include increasing the types of queries, additional data fields, improve data presentation, streamlining, improved website front page.

Sean Savile-You should make the landing page better suited for media.

John Kanter-A major recommendation is to improve the platform for submission of data, clearinghouse services provided by USFWS, and more capacity at USGS to do quality control. There are over 1000 taxonomic mismatches in the database. I'm looking for ways to connect to regional collaboratives. NEAFWA has a database that includes Northeast SWAP data. The Midwest is also developing a database and the Southeast has a database template. Three regional associations have regional SGCN. Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah are working on cross-boundary conservation with their SWAPs.

Landscape Conservation

Ken Elowe-AFWA and the FWS have been working on coordinating landscape conservation. It is not at the exclusion of other partners but since the FWS and states have management responsibility, they need to be on the same page. AFWA passed a resolution on landscape conservation and formed a President's Task Force with the FWS. This work is building upon the structure of regional fish and wildlife association collaboratives. The regional structures are perfect for giving states leadership on landscape conservation. Sara planted seeds with Martha Williams on the need for coordination and this resulted in the Joint Task Force on Landscape Conservation. An agreement was signed in Dec 2021. The task force is chaired by Tony Wasley and Martha Williams and its purpose is to support the region's landscape conservation work. They have been holding monthly meetings. Their priorities include the need to connect America the Beautiful Challenge Grants with regional priorities and provide opportunities to fund priorities of the regions. We are working to improve the grant process for next year. We are trying to understand the priorities and needs of the regions so they can be addressed at a national level. Capacity is always an issue. The Midwest Landscape Initiative and the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy have capacity. The states and FWS have a unique role and responsibility. Landscape Conservation and RAWA should not be talked about in separate silos. Can we stitch together the funding need and collaboratives needs?

Bat Working Group

Jenny Dickson-The Bat Working Group developed SARS-COV2 guidance. Since then, we've added new members. We will be pulling common themes together and discussing T&E listings and status assessments. There is a need to provide more information on wind energy and bats. Leanne Burns sends out a monthly e-newsletter on bats. We will be hosting a forum at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference to get feedback on bat needs.

Pollinator/Invertebrate Capacity & Networking

Ross Winton-I sent out a survey to wildlife diversity program managers on state authority. Approximately 170,000 invertebrates have been described. Most states have invertebrate authority and include some invertebrates in their State Wildlife Action Plans but lack invertebrate diversity. A lack of capacity and expertise are barriers. Most SWAPs are being revised. All states who responded to the survey said they need more technical information. Invertebrates make up most listing petitions and 45% of species on the FWS national plan. We would like to stand up a work group under this committee on invertebrates. Work on pollinators is also a need, at a larger level.

Sara Parker Pauley-I will take standing up of a work group into consideration.

America the Beautiful Challenge Grants-Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding is being administered by the National Wildlife Foundation. Three hundred and sixteen proposals, (one from each state) and 128 total state proposals were submitted. Total requests were about \$1 billion. States were included as reviewers. Proposals from 36 states were recommended for funding totaling \$70M. We are working on giving regional fish and wildlife associations the ability to apply for grants.

Overview of the Texas Wildlife Diversity Program-Jonah Evans reported that they recently went through a reorganization. There are 76,843 species under the authority of Texas and over 1,000 species of greatest conservation need (SGCN). We manage 55 active grants, most through State Wildlife Grants.

We have a program strategy and our goals are to classify species, recover priority species, tell the story of what we are doing and work to increase relevancy. We have developed new SGCN criteria using NatureServe Ranks. We do research to determine priority species and review existing research efforts. The NatureServe Ranking Process includes a number of criteria that puts out a rank. SGCN are grouped into data deficient and conservation ready. There are seven categories of knowledge. We rank knowledge for each category from 1-5. This helps us avoid endless research cycles. We use an air-table. We have assessed knowledge gaps for 170 SGCN. We require new State Wildlife Grants to identify knowledge voids. We found it's easy for a team to be demoralized when you don't do measurable conservation work. Once knowledge gaps are filled, we reverse engineer the S-ranks to help decide what can be done to improve the rank. It's imperfect but simple. We pick focal species for each taxonomic group. There are conservation challenges, there are only 14 conservation ready species. Making a species abundant again takes lots of time and resources. It will take decades to get to conservation-ready for all species. A RAWA task force has led to a draft allocation plan for RAWA for the first year of implementation. We are trying to find impactful and easy ways to allocate RAWA funds.

Meeting was Adjourned around 12pm.

Action Items

The SWAP Climate Guidance was approved; a new ad hoc work group on DEI will be stood up.

Progress and Opportunities

A continued push on the Recovering America's Wildlife Act is needed.

Threats and Emerging Issues Identified

None

New Opportunities Identified

None

Submitted By: Sara Parker Pauley