

International Relations Committee – Virtual Meeting Report

Meeting of September 3, 2024
Ryan Brown (Virginia), Co-chair
Christie Curley (Ontario), Co-Chair

Meeting convened from 11:00am to 12:30pm. There were 37 people in attendance.

Upcoming meetings and opportunities:

- Convention on Migratory Species Council Meeting: September 17, 2024
- Convention on Biological Convention Conference of the Parties (CoP): October 21 to November 1, 2025
- Ramsar Wetland Convention, 64th Standing Committee: January 20 to 24, 2025
- CITES 78th Standing Committee: February 3 to 8, 2025

International meeting timeline and opportunities for the next two years: CBD, IUCN, CMS, ISO Biodiversity Standard Development, etc. (Deb Hahn, AFWA): The coming year to year and a half includes key international meetings and opportunities to influence the global conservation agenda and ensure that the state, provincial and territorial priorities and voice are heard. You can access a copy of the meeting timeline [here](#). Important events and meetings include the IUCN World Conservation Congress and the motions develop process leading up to that meeting, the development of an ISO standard for biodiversity, wetland conservation through the Ramsar Convention, and CITES meetings. The Committee will prioritize its engagement, work with global partners, and engage our members when input is needed.

CITES Technical Work Group Update (Buddy Baker, Gordon Batcheller, Carolyn Caldwell, Stewart Liley) CITES, the Conventional on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, is an important international agreement that governs trade of listed species. AFWA established the Work Group in 1994 to ensure that state, provincial, and territorial agency perspectives were brought to the table during discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and at CITES meetings. Each of the four regional associations are represented on the work group, and AFWA provides strong leadership and coordination on behalf of state fish and wildlife agencies.

The Work Group attended the 33rd Animals Committee (AC) this summer. There were no critical issues being decided at the meeting, but the Team had important discussions about eels, seahorse, corals, and other topics. The [Technical Work Group's Report](#) is available on AFWA's website. Every three years, CITES convenes a Conference of the Parties (CoP). In preparation for CoP 20, the USFWS published a Federal Register notice. It asked the public for recommendations for possible U.S. submission at CoP20 including species proposals to amend the CITES Appendices. The public recommended hundreds of species. We are reviewing the merits of the native species. To this end, we had discussions at the AC meeting, are in communication with the USFWS, and are looking at the LEMIS trade data, as well as talking informally with state, provincial and territorial wildlife agencies to gather more information.

Dates of Importance:

December 2024: USFWS publishes the 2nd Federal Register Notice announcing what species they are unlikely, likely, and undecided to bring listing proposals for to the next CoP.

February 2025: CITES Standing Committee meeting. The Standing Committee will discuss important policy issues and take recommendations from the AC to make recommendations to the CoP.

~July 2025: Deadline for submission of species proposals, resolutions, decisions, and other documents for CoP 20.

Likely December 2025: CoP 20

In the coming weeks and months, the Work Group will be reaching out to the regional associations and individual states, provinces and territories to gain insights and input on key issues likely to be taken up at the next CoP, including species listing proposals. Input from species experts is very important.

The recently completed report *Overview of the International Trade in United States Turtle Species 2000-2023* is available on the [International Relations Committee website](#). The purpose was to conduct a pilot assessment of trade using U.S. turtle trade data.

CITES Non-Detriment Findings (Deb): Non-detriment findings (NDF) are an important part of the CITES process. They are a science-based study that assesses whether trade will have a negative (or detrimental) effect on the survival of that species. We convened a group to discuss the draft NDF modules produced through a CITES workshop. The modules are currently being reviewed and tested by the CITES community. The group had the following recommendations:

- Share recommendations through the Secretariat and formally and informally with Parties and track guidance through the CITES process over time and weigh in as needed.
- Generally, we support how the guidance recommended a lower threshold (simpler NDF) for lower risk species. We support simpler NDFs in general.
- Support a simplified NDF particularly for lookalike species and for the movements of parts (e.g., hair) that is for conservation and research purposes.
- Concern about including an animal's role in an ecosystem.
- Potential concerns in the migratory species/ trans boundary module for work between the U.S. and Mexico.
- Population estimates and harvest trends are not available for many species. This would be a concern if it was required. The wording around this is important.

River otter (*Lontra canadensis*) assessment Nathan Roberts College of the Ozarks): River otter (*Lontra canadensis*) inhabit most of the United States. Published work in 2020 (Roberts et al, 2020) concluded that river otter populations have been increasing for decades and that no state jurisdictions reported declining populations. The objective of this study was to document the regulatory status, population trajectory, and monitoring efforts for river otter within the state jurisdictions in the U.S. as of 2024. State jurisdictions, sans Hawaii, were provided a survey during June and July regarding river otters within their respective jurisdictions. States were asked to identify the management classification of river otter as either regulated season, closed season, "state threatened" or "state endangered." State jurisdictions were also asked if the river otter population trajectory, relative to the last five years, was increasing, stable, decreasing or unknown. Lastly, state jurisdictions were asked if river otter populations are monitored within their jurisdiction. We received responses from 41 states, representing all geographical regions of the United States. Of the responding states, all but four states (Arizona, California, Colorado and Rhode Island) had regulated harvest seasons. None of the responding states reported a declining population, 14 reported an increasing population, 24 reported

a stable population, and four states reported that the population status was unknown. Three states reported either increasing and stable' or 'increasing and unknown' reflecting geographic variability within their jurisdictional borders. All states report that some monitoring of river otters occurs. Similar to data reported in 2020 (Roberts et al, 2020), river otter populations in the United States are secure. Regulated harvest programs occur in most states and all states monitor these populations to some extent. State management of the species has yielded and continues to yield successful conservation. There is no evidence that the regulated take of river otter in the United States is detrimental to their population security.

USFWS International Affairs Update: (Hila Levy): Hila Levy started as the USFWS's Assistant Director for International Affairs in July. She reported on a variety of key topics. Improving the permitting process and alleviating burdens to permit applicants is a priority. They have made notable improvements over the past year including digitizing the top five applications, which are all for the export of wildlife listed in CITES, reducing the amount of work needed to submit paper applications. A third party, comprehensive needs analysis of the permitting program identified opportunities to innovate and optimize the process to better serve permit applicants and maximize conservation outcomes. They are working to implement the recommendations from this analysis as funding and resources are available.

The Big Cat Public Safety Act makes it unlawful for any person to import, export, transport, sell, receive, acquire, purchase, breed, or possess the following species and hybrids of any of these species: lion, tiger, leopard, snow leopard, clouded leopard, jaguar, cheetah, and cougar. The only exception is for private individuals or entities who owned big cat(s) before this law was enacted and registered each big cat with the USFWS by June 18, 2023.

The U.S. is working on designating the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge as a Wetland of International Importance through the Ramsar Convention. The North Carolina refuge spans over 110,000 acres and is one of the largest contiguous wetland tracts in both the state of North Carolina and along the Atlantic Coast of the United States. The refuge includes peatlands, which are underrepresented on the Ramsar list and are particularly vulnerable to habitat loss and degradation.

Next year, Canada (Environment and Climate Change Canada) will host the 29th Annual Trilateral for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management Committee meeting in the spring. The following working tables will hold sessions, focusing on collaborative conservation projects and opportunities: 1) CITES (TBD), 2) Ecosystem Conservation, 3) Law Enforcement, 4) Migratory Birds, 5) Species of Common Conservation Concern, and 6) Executive. The theme of the Plenary Session will be diversity and inclusion in conservation. Additionally, bison and ocelot Letters of Intent are being developed to protect, restore, and advance conservation objectives across the three countries.

The CITES Export Program (CEP) is a permitting efficiency designed to allow States and tribes to export certain CITES Appendix-II listed species (American ginseng, American alligator, and 5 species of furbearers). The CEP streamlines permit applications and processing by making annual or 5-year programmatic legal acquisition findings and non-detriment findings for the above listed species from approved state(s) or tribe(s) programs. The CEP has 47 approved state programs for furbearers, 9 approved state programs for American alligator, and 22 approved state programs for American ginseng. We are working to identify ways to increase the program's efficiency while ensuring all legal requirements under 50 CFR 23.68 through 23.70 are being met. For example, we worked closely with the states on the distribution of CEP tags (alligator and furbearer only) for the upcoming harvest season.

To prepare for the CITES CoP20 in accordance with USFWS CITES regulations (<https://cites.org/eng/app/appendices.php>) for public engagement and transparency, the U.S. informs the public about the CoP through a series of Federal Register (FR) notices, at least one public meeting and website postings in advance of CoP20. The first FR notice was published March 2024. In response to this FR Notice, they received over 150+ recommendations for native species inclusion or transfers from Appendix II to Appendix I. Native species recommendations included the non-CITES listed U.S. turtle species (22 species), rattlesnakes, American eel, gulper sharks, oceanic whitetip shark for a transfer to Appendix I, sea cucumbers, tarantulas and other U.S. spider species, arctic mammals, and white sage, along with several U.S. timber species. The Division of Scientific Authority is currently evaluating the recommendations to determine whether they meet the biological and trade criteria for inclusion in CITES Appendix I or II per Resolution Conf. 9.24. The next FR Notice will again solicit further information and comments from the public on species proposals that the United States is “likely, undecided, or unlikely’ to consider for submission at CoP20

CIC Updates (Sebastian Winkler): The CIC with its State Members enjoys a preferential Intergovernmental Organization Observer Status in most of the Multilateral environment agreements and last autumn also obtained this status within the Ramsar Convention for Wetlands of International Importance. In 2024, CIC will attend or has attended the CMS and CBD CoPs as well as CITES and Ramsar meetings. CIC will also attend the AFWA meeting where it hopes to meet in person to further elaborate a strategic and impactful collaboration with AFWA.

Action Items / Resolutions / Motions: Decide on the timeline of input by the Committee and the timing of virtual meetings to solicit input.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED: N/A

Submitted by Ryan Brown and Christie Curley

Committee Member Attendees:

Ryan Brown, Virginia Department of Wildlife Conservation
Christie Curley, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Hila Levy, USFWS
Don Morgan, USFWS
Will Dillman, South Carolina DNR
Jennifer Sheehan, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Gordon Batcheller, NEAFWA
Buddy Baker, SEAFWA
Jeremy Clare, Safari Club International
John Jackson, Conservation Force
Carolyn Caldwell, MAFWA
Kurt Alt, Wild Sheep Foundation
Sara Schweitzer, NCWRC
Doug Beard, USGS
Mike O’Brien, Fur Institute of Canada

Non-Committee Members Attendees:

Hugh Hunt, CWDC

Sebastian Winkler, CIC
Tristan Beijer, CIC and FACE
Ben Mulligan, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Shannon Lott, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Laura Conlee, Missouri Department of Conservation
Doug Chiasson, Fur Institute of Canada
Carolina Sanabria, AFWA
Tadj Adams, AFWA
Joseph Goergen, JAMMA
Matt Elliott, Georgia DNR
Jenna Shinen, US State Department
Patrick Reilly, US State Department
Annie Arbuthnot, US State Department
Anusree Garg, US State Department
Nathan Roberts, College of the Ozarks
Angela Galarreta, USFWS
Rose Gnam, USFWS