

AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE DRAFT MINUTES

Chair: David Golden (NJ)
Vice-Chair: Thomas Eason (FL)

Date: September 10, 2021
Time: 10am-1pm EST

111th AFWA Annual Meeting
Virtual



Agenda

10:00 am **Call to Order/Introductions/ Review of Agenda**
David Golden, New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife

The meeting opened at 1:02 pm. Chairman Golden introduced the committee vice-chair, Thomas Eason who previously served as the committee chair. Chairman Golden introduced Kerry Wixted, the new Amphibian and Reptile and Invasive Species Program Manager for AFWA. She previously worked for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. kwixted@fishwildlife.org

- 10:10 **Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) Updates w/ Q & A**
Sean Saville, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ssaville@fishwildlife.org
- *Bipartisan Senate bill ([S.2372](#)) introduced by Sens. Heinrich (D-NM) and Blunt (R-MO) on July 20th.*
 - *High-level outreach to Senate offices is particularly appreciated and encouraged now to build strong bipartisan support.*
 - *Of important note, the only major difference between the Senate and House versions is the "source of funding" language in the Senate bill. This identifies civil or criminal penalties, fines, sanctions, and similar federal revenues generated from violations of environmental and natural resources laws and regulations as the source to fund the legislation. An important clarifier added means no one else's programs are being harmed, no dedicated penalties monies like those from the Deepwater Horizon settlement or other programs that would also go to habitat restoration projects are being touched.*

- Reports show that funding annually averages out to about \$2.9B over past 5-years and \$1.9B over the past 10 yrs.
- The stage is set for full House committee markup this fall and there are [110 bipartisan cosponsors](#).
- Advocacy and outreach tools can be found under the “More Resources” tab on the home page [HERE](#) ; Partners can be found here: <https://ournatureusa.com/our-partners/>
- View the latest messaging, resources, and other campaign materials, see the Alliance online toolkit [HERE](#)

10:15 **Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) and the Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC) Briefing**

Michelle Christman, PARC michelle_christman@fws.gov

- Timber Rattlesnake Conservation Action Plan (TRCAP) now available
- DEITT group
- Amphibian Week is first week in May; will focus on outreach for amphibians
- PARCAS could be a future item to discuss with the committee
- ARC has new executive director: JJ Apodaca

10:30 **Transportation Opportunities**

Maggie Ernest Johnson, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
mjohnson@fishwildlife.org

- Hosting quarterly calls on wildlife and transportation issues; the last call was in August and the next will be on November 10; please contact Maggie if interested in joining in
- The Infrastructure bill (HR 364, S1931, HR 3684)
- DOT funding could be a possible RAWA match funding source

10:35 **BSAL Update and Next Steps**

Michael Adams, USGS Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative
mjadams@usgs.gov

- Covered Bsal and concerns for North American salamanders
- 20 taxonomic groups (200+spp) of salamanders listed as injurious with bans on import
- FWS working on a final rule
- There is a need for policy tools, awareness, and early detection
- Drew Dittmer asked about PIJAC pushback and whether a review of state regulations that allow interstate transportation of salamanders as bait has been conducted
- Kate Parsons mentioned that connections to law enforcement will be key
- Michelle Christman mentioned there is a federal Bsal taskforce and suggested creating a state taskforce that could work with them
- Chairman Golden suggested forming a Bsal Working Group; Thomas Eason made a motion and Tom Jones seconded it
- **Action:** A Bsal Working group will be formed; Kerry Wixted will send out a notice to committee members to ask for someone to serve as a chair and to solicit working group members.

10:45 **Rhode Island Update**

Scott Buchanan, Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife scott.buchanan@dem.ri.gov

- Scott covered herp diversity in RI; the herp program began in 2018 and is funded primarily by SWG
- [Amphibians of Rhode Island book](#) now available
- Updated [herp regulations](#)
- Works with University partners on road mortality hotspots, diamondback terrapin telemetry, wood turtle surveys and telemetry
- HerpObserver created with Survey 1-2-3
- Used volunteer monitoring to conduct diamondback terrapin point count surveys; number of observations increased with surveys
- Used eyeshine surveys to monitor for spadefoot toads; built artificial pools in historically occupied areas & released rescued spadefoots into them

11:00 **USGS Herp Tool**

Michelle Jeffries, USGS mjeffries@usgs.gov

- Provided an overview of the Amphibian and Reptile Species Distribution Explorer tool
- Used data from TNC, BLM, etc to create boundaries while species data from USGS GAP analysis project and IUCN
- Allows for creation of species list for county, state, ecoregion & more which should be useful for resource managers and the general public
- Tool is not yet public as they are still tailoring the tool for partner needs; the finest scale for distribution is county scale and is based off publicly available data, so it should not be an issue with aiding poachers
- **Action:** Kerry Wixted will set up a meeting with Michelle and interested committee members to go through a more thorough demo and beta test of the tool.

11:15 **Break**

11:20 **CITES update**

Carolyn Caldwell, MAFWA CITES Technical Work Group Representative

- Virtually no activities in 2020 as treaty not prepped for non-face-to-face meetings
- 2021 included virtual meetings with lots of participation but complicated to complete items
- In the last 10 yrs, there has been a significant increase in herp issues with CITES, and it is difficult to keep up with issues
- Seeking the assistance of the Amphibian and Reptile Committee. Help could come through an individual point person or a small working group who can assemble the necessary information --species range wide status, conservation and management measures being implemented, as well as current State regulations for herpetofauna -- and provide it to the CITES Technical Work Group.
- **Action:** Kerry Wixted will set up a meeting with Carolyn and committee chairs to discuss how the committee might be able to assist with some help

11:25 **Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) Update & Discussion**

Scott Buchanan, Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife

- *Covered history, mission, and workgroups associated with CCITT*
- *Encouraged participants to join CCITT:*
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScDN-AmYzSckZ2G9GCod3aBb4Kcx5BGU00IhyzuQmw2BtwoYg/viewform?fbclid=IwAR3obS-3ODcfYyjc_h2I2mOUoZDUf8E4rOP4TRTIrH9xofwi0vL7bBLSTQc
- *Posed questions to the group to see who was a member, what barriers do they face with law enforcement engagement, and what successes they might have*
 - *Drew Dittmer (Utah) has a set amount contract with a private herpeculturist to deal with confiscated herps; many of the zoos cannot take on the volumes of animals and have concerns about disease; some of the barriers he has noted include the need for species ID training & he has suggested the use of iNaturalist to assist with field ID by officers. The contract funding is provided by the native species section.*
 - *Michelle Christman (PARC) mentioned that there are different types of confiscation to consider: confiscation with an active case and confiscation with forfeiture; she mentioned it was important to facilitate relationships and connections before there is a need*
 - *Brad O'Hanlon (Florida) mentioned he has had success working with champions within law enforcement; he created paper and electronic guides to species ID and has provided them for others to view*
 - *Grant (Florida) mentioned that there was a need for more outreach and awareness as well as a continuation of communications, particularly with a focus on time of year trends; some of the barriers include lack of education materials and comfort level with identification*

11:50 **Model Policy for Conservation of Turtles and Other Priority Actions**

Gordon Batcheller, Administrator of the Legal Strategies Advisory Committee, "Think Tank"

gordon.batcheller@gmail.com

- *The "Think Tank" is designed to contemplate broad conservation issues. They work on solutions and outcomes to advance conservation. They don't make policies but pose ideas and products.*
- *Gordon reviewed Model Statutory Language document with committee and suggested adopting language as part of an AFWA resolution to combat the illegal trade in turtles*
- **Action:** *The Committee will work in conjunction with legal and law enforcement committees to address illegal turtle trade with the goal of drafting a resolution for committees to review and revise at the North American conference.*

12:00 **Committee Work Plan Discussion**

David Golden, New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife

Review of 2020-2021 Objectives:

- *Objective #1 to hire state coordinator was accomplished in July 2021.*
- *Objectives #2 & 3 to plan a joint session with the AFWA LE Committee in the coming year to discuss amphibian and reptile trafficking trends with the PARC Turtle Networking Team were partially accomplished with a 1 hr training workshop in March 2021 at the North American meeting.*
- *It was decided that Objective #4 was no longer a priority for the committee, but discussion did include providing possible outreach from the PARC Disease Task Team.*

2021-2022 Objectives:

1. *Lead formation of a Bsal working group to coordinate with the federal Bsal taskforce. The working group will explore options for increasing Bsal awareness and developing an early detection protocol using the Bsal strategic plan.*
2. *Plan regional workshops to address illegal turtle trade. Work with the AFWA Law Enforcement and Legal committees to design a draft resolution on the illegal turtle trade and adoption of model statutory for conservation of amphibian and reptile species.*
3. *Work with CITES Technical Work Group to provide amphibian and reptile information as needed.*
4. *Coordinate with the PARC Disease Task Team to provide learning opportunities for committee members on herpetological diseases.*

12:20 **Partner and State Roundtable**

Federal, state, and partner updates

- *Kate Parsons (Ohio): Midwest PARC conference is virtual and free this year - <https://www.mwparc.org/copy-of-products> Oct 1-2. Reptiles of Ohio can also be found here <https://www.ohiobiologicalsurvey.org/publications/>*
- *Tom Jones (Arizona): Cristina Jones is now with FWS, and the turtle project coordinator position is now open.*
- *Carol Hall (Minnesota): We are embarking on a Wood Turtle eDNA pilot project to improve our understanding of their distribution in SE MN (particularly tributaries that have had little-to-no surveys). We accomplished eliminating Softshell turtles from commercial harvest. Currently working on developing a Blanding's Turtle monitoring initiative at a significant population in SE MN.*
- *Michelle Christman (PARC): VA Museum of Natural History is hiring an Assistant Curator of Herpetology: <https://www.vmnh.net/about/careers>*
- *Craig Martin (USFWS) brought up the American Rescue Plan Act and the fact that agencies can list species that might bring disease into the states. The focus is primarily on birds and mammals, but herps might be part of the global horizon scan for novel pathogens.*
- *Brad O'Hanlon (Florida): Currently monitoring the turtle bunyavirus (<https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/wildlife/freshwater-turtles/tbv/>) which has 100% mortality and is currently found in the St. Johns watershed. A paper is ready for publication on this subject. Florida is also currently revising terrapin collection rules but is receiving pushback from the reptile industry.*

- *Scott Smith (Maryland): Currently working updating captive amphibian and reptile regulations but might look at statutes, too. With the Bsal concerns, bait trade of salamanders might also be a priority to update. Also updating T&E list and is working on an RCN project on terrapins.*
- *Jeff Hall (North Carolina): Working on project with trail cameras and rattlesnakes to view interactions and behaviors. It has been interesting so far. Will be updating loopholes relating to trade such as requiring importation permits for native species in the trade and changes to wildlife collection license. Will be adding species like tegus to restricted species list and will also be working on T&E updates.*
- *Drew Dittmer (Utah): Working with iNaturalist and NatureServe to better coordinate data sharing. They are also working on flagging records and asking about methods to obscure locations.*

12:55 **Wrap-up Discussion**

1:00 pm **Adjourn**