

The AFWA Strategist

Update for Members and Partners of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Summer 2021

AFWA Government Affairs



JOIN US FOR THE 2021 ASSOCIATION OF FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES ANNUAL MEETING

SEPTEMBER 8-14 • HYBRID MEETING
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Registration is now OPEN for
AFWA's 2021 Annual Meeting at
www.AFWAAnnualMeeting.org

CRP Signups Reopened with Policy Changes

On June 14, USDA reopened general and continuous CRP signups with higher rental rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. There are currently 20.7 million acres enrolled in the program, more than 4 million acres under the statutorily authorized cap; additional incentives were needed to drive landowner interest. Specific changes include moving the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) back to the continuous signup, introducing new Climate Smart Incentive Payments, increasing Practice Incentive Payments, allowing for rental rates to be adjusted upward on more productive soils, and adjusting rental payments for inflation. A full summary of changes is available [here](#). USDA will also open the CRP Grasslands signup on July 12, instituting a new \$15 minimum per acre rental payment, which will increase average rental rates in over 1,300 counties nationwide.

Working Lands for Wildlife Frameworks

NRCS [released](#) two "frameworks" to guide their conservation actions across the Great Plains Grasslands and Sagebrush Biome. The frameworks represent an update to, and 2021-2025 roadmap for implementation of, the Sage Grouse Initiative and Great Plains Grasslands Initiative, formerly the Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative. Each framework ([Sagebrush](#) and [Grasslands](#)) identifies overarching threats (land use conversion, woodland expansion, etc.), guides conservation implementation through by setting geographic focus areas and anticipated outcomes, and provides the scientific and technical resources underpinning the strategy.

Dedicated Funding for Wildlife Crossings Included in Transportation Bills

On June 10, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure advanced the *INVEST in America Act* (H.R. [3648](#)), which includes one of AFWA's major legislative priorities, dedicated funding for aquatic and terrestrial species habitat connectivity. The bill would provide annual funding of \$100 million for the Wildlife Crossings Program through FY26. This followed the May 26 hearing in the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works where the *Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act of 2021* ([S.1931](#)), advanced to the full Senate with the inclusion of a nearly identical program funded through FY26 with \$350 million total.

Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund Reauthorization Advancing

On June 16, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation advanced the *Sport Fish Restoration and Recreational Boating Safety Act of 2021* ([S. 1995](#)), favorably reporting the legislation near-unanimously with only one member recorded in opposition. [AFWA praised](#) the bill's sponsors, Committee Chair Cantwell (D-WA) and Ranking Member Wicker (R-MS), as well as the full Committee for advancing the legislation without amendment. A last-minute amendment was proposed that would have limited State Agencies' authority to use the fund, but thanks to immediate efforts by our members and partners it was rejected by a vote of 19-9. Its companion legislation in the House, [H.R. 3702](#), introduced by Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA), awaits a hearing in the House Natural Resources Committee. The only major change from last year's legislation is the addition of dual-reporting language which would have the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council report to the Department of Commerce in addition to the Department of the Interior, amplifying the voice of recreational anglers.

Infrastructure Negotiations Intensifying

On June 24, President Biden announced his support for a [\\$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure plan](#) formed in agreement with a group of 10 Senators, 5 from each side of the aisle. Negotiations will continue as they have yet to confirm enough support for passage, but it marks a significant step before Congress enters the still-pending August recess. While further details of the plan are yet to be revealed, the outline primarily focuses on traditional infrastructure rather than the broader provisions supported by the majority. However, it is likely that an additional infrastructure bill will be advanced through uni-partisan action via the reconciliation process.

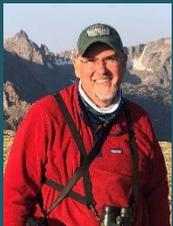
Annual Awards

Call for Nominations

Please take a minute and think of a team or individual within your agency as well as private stakeholders who are deserving of national recognition for their outstanding work to advance fish and wildlife conservation.

Nominations are due
July 1, 2021

For awards criteria and nomination details, go to:
www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-acts/annual-awards



New Employee!

We are pleased to announce that Kurt Thiede will join the AFWA family as our new Government Affairs Director.



New Employee!

We are pleased to announce that Kerry Wixted will join the AFWA family as our new Amphibian/Reptile and Invasive Species Program Manager.

We're Hiring!

AFWA is accepting applications for the positions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Contractor and Instructional Designer Contractor for Project WILD. For more information, visit www.fishwildlife.org/careers



2020 AFWA Annual Report

The Association recently released its 2020 Annual Report in which we focus on building resilience and the power of adaptation.

Download at www.fishwildlife.org

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Recovering America's Wildlife Act- Update

This week's *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* virtual fly-in has been a great success! Together as a coalition we conducted over 65 virtual meetings with congressional offices and gathered at least [15 new cosponsors](#), bringing the total count to 69 on the House bill (H.R.2773). This was an excellent team effort coordinated by many of the [Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife](#) partners in DC, state fish and wildlife agencies and organizations in states and districts across the country. It is always good to see a plan come together and this one certainly presented some logistical challenges, but never underestimate a sophisticated coalition and a campaign driven by a shared vision for dedicated wildlife conservation funding. The response from the Hill was overwhelmingly positive on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers. This is truly a bipartisan bill supported by a broad and diverse coalition and we thank everyone for their participation and great work this week. We are optimistic that we will see a companion bill introduced in the Senate soon and the groundwork laid this week will help to expedite the cosponsor push on that side as well. There is a lot of follow up to do and more cosponsors to confirm, but we'll send more updates and news as we get it. For your reference, see the materials prepared for the fly-in [HERE](#). Thank you everyone and have a great July 4th holiday! For any questions about the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*, please contact Sean Saville at ssaville@fishwildlife.org; 202-441-4214.

State Wildlife Action Plans

The State Wildlife Action Plan and Landscape Conservation Working Group is continuing its work to develop guiding principles and recommendations to help State Wildlife Action Plans better guide and contribute to landscape conservation and be ready for *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* implementation. The work group is led by Jon Regosin (MA) and Norman Murray (MDOC) and includes two agency staff from each regional fish and wildlife association, the USFWS, USFS and USGS. Staff from the National Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, NatureServe and AFWA are also participating on the work group. The work group will present its report to the Wildlife Diversity Conservation and Funding Committee in September. Formation of the work group was a recommendation of the AFWA President's Task Force on Science and Landscape Conservation Priorities.

Strategic Planning Updates

Work on operationalizing goals 1, 2 & 4 of AFWA's new strategic plan continues on schedule. Timmons group, the consultants helping us, will present metrics and a prototype dashboard to Directors at the Annual Meeting in Providence, most likely on Sunday morning. We are looking forward to your feedback on the work that been done! Please contact jlord@fishwildlife.org with any questions.

AFWA Annual Meeting Planning

The AFWA Annual Meeting will be held September 8-13, 2021, and will be a hybrid meeting:

- Committee meetings will be conducted through an online platform from Wednesday the 8th through Friday the 10th.
- Saturday the 11th will be a travel day for Directors and guests who are able to gather in person in Providence.
- Sunday the 12th through Tuesday the 14th we will hold in person, Director focused meetings.

All public meetings held in Providence will also be available online through the meeting web portal. We will also hold several online leadership development workshops open to all attendees. For more information and to register please go to the meeting website: <https://www.afwaannualmeeting.org>.