



ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES



2023
**ANNUAL
REPORT**





“Outdoor recreation is one of our nation’s largest economic engines. It touches all Americans, from small rural towns to those living in bustling cities and continues to be a powerful force in our nation’s economy.”

Chuck Sykes

Director of the Alabama Division of Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries and President of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.



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President's Message

The thematic focus of this Annual Report boils down to the importance of managing fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of the citizens of our states, provinces, and territories. To put a finer point on it, people need to be in the outdoors, they need to awaken to the sounds of nature while watching the sun rise, and they need to put wholesome food on the table for family and friends. Our agencies help make that a reality.

As 2023 drew to a close, I needed time and space to reflect on a professional matter that was deeply personal. That space proved to be among old forest friends, one in particular, a lightning-struck, weathered, beaten, and broken chestnut oak, where I could think — think hard about our conservation institutions — from a tree stand. Call it One Health, call it nature's therapy, call it what you will, I need that time in the outdoors to recharge my battery and get my mind in a better place in order to handle the personal and professional issues that life throws at me. I'm confident that others like me, grow calm and feel better when outdoors in a natural setting.

The numbers tell the story. According to the 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, 39 million people went recreational fishing, 14 million people went hunting, in both cases, 16 years and older, and 148 million people participated in wildlife watching.

I am pleased and honored to serve as the President of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies for a season. Even though it may take me away from that old chestnut oak, I can see a higher purpose from the windows of a flight to another meeting when, among colleagues, we think about serving American and Canadian citizens with opportunities to embrace nature with a shotgun, a bow, a casting rod, or a pair of binoculars. I want to help the Association steer towards a nature-based beacon of renewal, hope, and health for any and all members of society.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve and with best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles F. Sykes". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Chuck Sykes

President

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies



Executive Director's Message

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies is a remarkable organization, one made so by all of you. Even after more than a decade of serving as your Executive Director, I remain energized by the new and compelling opportunities for meaningful work in conservation and outdoor recreation spaces at national scales.

2023 was all about courage — to stand up again for dedicated, sustainable stateside funding for fish and wildlife in keeping with the vision of the Blue Ribbon Panel.

2023 was all about boldness — to embrace new opportunities to demonstrate the value of wildlife and wild places through new collective attention to healthy people, healthy landscapes, and healthy wildlife.

2023 was all about commitment — to bring our Annual Meeting to Canada for the first time in 35 years and to renew partnerships that transcend borders and boundaries to advance conservation.

2023 was all about making the case — to support the relevancy of our conservation institutions and the services they provide to all citizens, from all walks of life, including opportunities for enjoying nature.

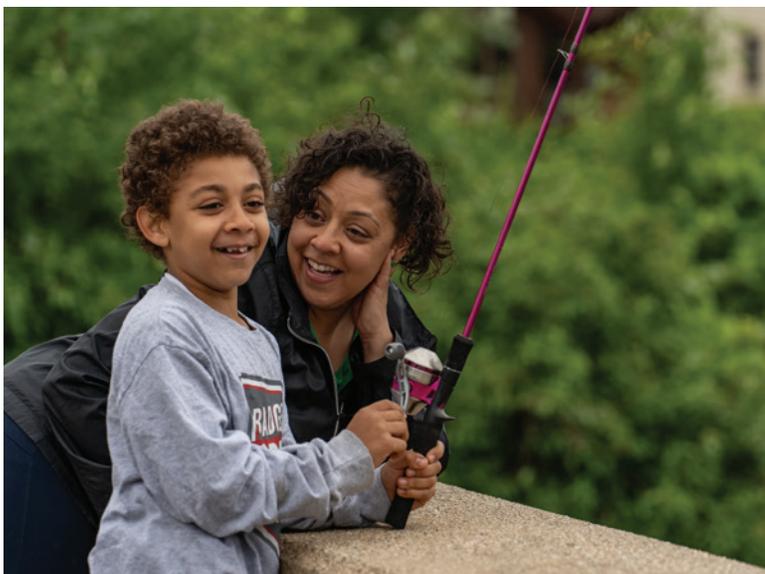
Your support and engagement are vital to each and every portfolio of the Association's work. Indeed, with the extent of leadership turnover in state, provincial, and territorial agencies, coupled with that of partner and member organizations, the importance of "leaning in" could not be more important than now! I look forward to new relationships and friendships in 2024 to facilitate that.

Very best regards,



Ronald J. Regan

Executive Director
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies



ALLIANCE FOR AMERICA'S FISH & WILDLIFE CAMPAIGN



The year began with mixed emotions about the prospects of passing the Recovering America's Wildlife Act in the 118th Congress. Many were still reeling from the disappointment of nearly passing the bill in the waning days of the last Congress and with the new House majority focused squarely on fiscal responsibility, we knew there would be challenges ahead. That said, the heightened profile, visibility of and support for the bill in the previous year translated to good early momentum in 2023 and renewed optimism for champions on the Hill. The need for this historic legislation has never been greater and states, tribes and partners were ready to hit the ground running and capitalize on the widespread support for the bill that was built in the last year.

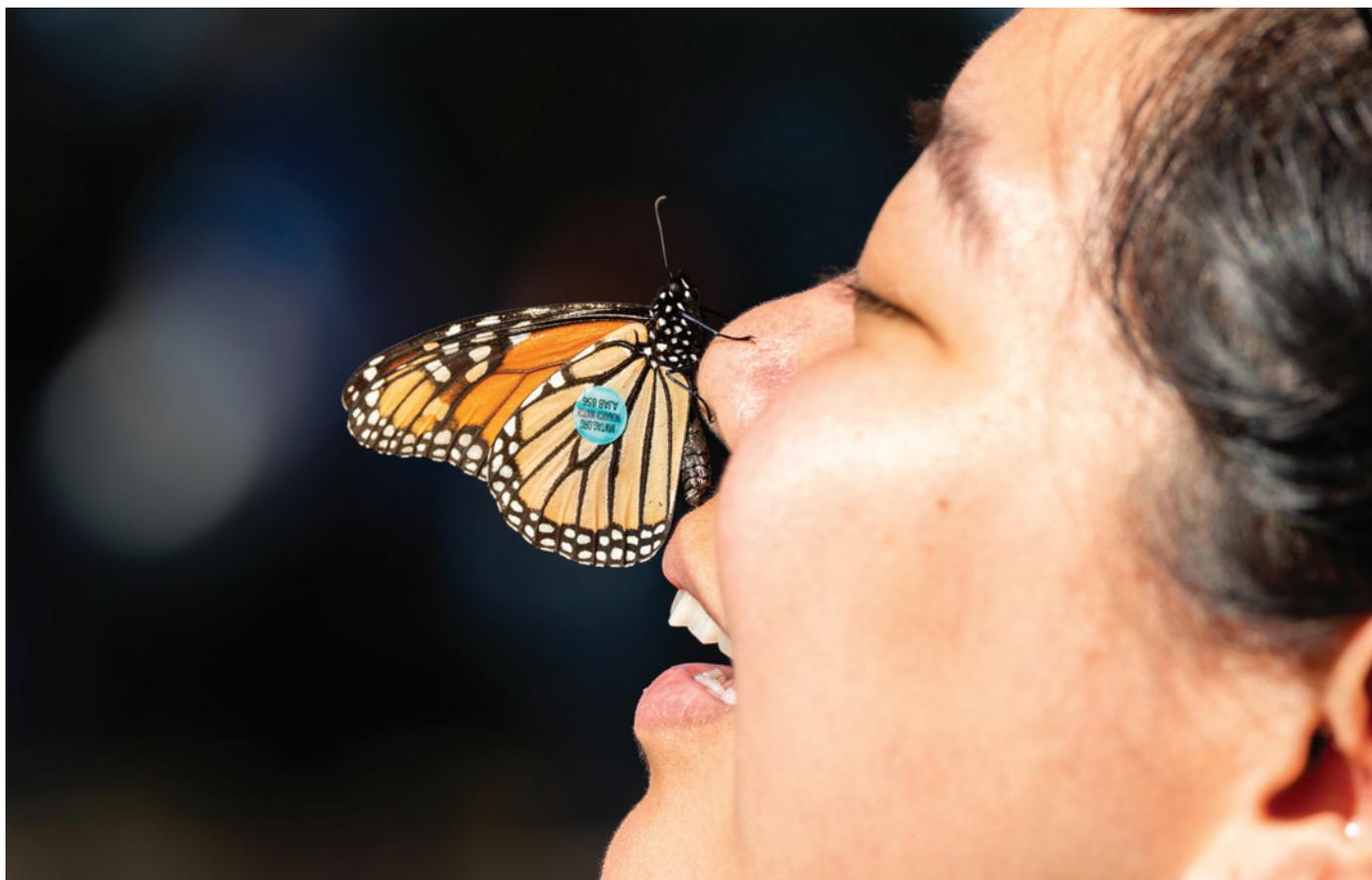
Senators Heinrich (D-NM) and Tillis (R-NC) once again introduced the Recovering America's Wildlife Act in March with commitments from many of the previous bipartisan Senate cosponsors to come back on board quickly. The broad and diverse Alliance for

America's Fish & Wildlife partnership were instrumental in onboarding the first 10 bipartisan cosponsors including two new supporters. Chairman Carper of the Environment and Public Works Committee was integral to the passage of the bill through his committee in the last Congress and Senator Budd (R-NC) was brought on personally by his NC colleague and lead Republican on the bill, Senator Tillis. Two more bipartisan pairs added a month later would bring the cosponsor total to 15 just before the July 4th recess. Then for one reason or another the momentum stalled a bit during the summer lull and long recess in D.C., largely due to lack of an identified way to pay for the bill, which is the same issue that ultimately led to the demise of the measure at the end of 2022.

Meanwhile on the House side, Congresswoman Dingell was committed to introducing the bill again despite the uphill battle awaiting her and other supporters given the new House rules and conservative opposition to enacting new spending, especially dedicated or mandatory spending. Chairman Westerman of the House Committee on Natural Resources gave early signals that he intended to introduce a bill akin to the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, but it was clear he had a different vision for what the bill should look like. Given the House political dynamics and makeup of his committee, we knew the road ahead would be rocky, however we were encouraged by the Chairman's open support of the concept of the bill and commitment to working with the Association and other partners to develop a bill that would stand a chance of passing the House. That all came to fruition at the end of 2023 with the Chairman's crafting of a draft bill that focused on habitat and maintained support for state fish and wildlife agencies and tribes to do conservation work on the ground in collaboration with private landowners and other partners. The hope is that introduction of this bill will spark continued conversations about how we can address America's accelerating conservation challenges at the scale necessary. We sincerely appreciate the champions on the Hill that continue to lead the charge for wildlife conservation and look forward to getting a bill passed that secures sustainable fish and wildlife funding for states, tribes and partners to do collaborative conservation on the

ground to prevent the more than 12,000 species of fish and wildlife from becoming further threatened or endangered.

The Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife continues to grow and become a more diverse and influential coalition of engaged partners united around the shared vision of predictable funding for states and partners to do the work that is needed for our wildlife and our future generations. New industry partners have joined the effort and have brought renewed interest and resources to making a strong business case for the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. The economic arguments for preventative, proactive and voluntary conservation in collaboration with the private sector are clear. It will be our job to continue to tell that story in a compelling way in order to leverage congressional support for the legislation in 2024 and beyond. The good news is that there is growing bipartisan congressional awareness and support for providing funding to state fish and wildlife agencies to implement their congressionally mandated State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs). Securing permanent and dedicated funding for states and tribes to address the 12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) remains the top priority for the Association. Therefore, we will remain vigilant and opportunistic as we advocate for this critical legislation.



LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This year highlighted the importance of engagement in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we helped implement the new CITES reptile listings (alligator and common snapping turtles; all map, musk, and soft-shelled turtles; and desert horned lizard) through webinars and meetings and supported effective delivery of furbearer tags. We advanced the analysis of CITES data to inform future listings and downlistings, engaged on priority issues such as American eel conservation, the nexus between reducing the risk of future pandemics and CITES, and non-detriment findings guidance. The International Relations Committee produced a [briefing paper](#) on

sustainable use as it relates to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services sustainable use assessment and the Global Biodiversity Framework. Through the CBD's Advisory Committee for Subnational Governments, we provided input on subnational governments and their importance for implementation of biodiversity conservation. The year wrapped up with preparations for the 14th CMS Conference of the Parties.



GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS & CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY

With a gridlocked Congress, a grand total of 29 bills were enacted throughout the entirety of 2023, the majority of which were either must-pass budget bills or benign administrative changes. However, the States and our coalition partners proved once again that the core issues surrounding hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation offer a path for progress and bipartisan consensus. Two critical pieces of legislation were enacted due in large part to the work of our members, and we continued to drive the remainder of our priorities forward on Capitol Hill as well as with the Administration to position us for even more success in the closing year of the 118th Congress.

Enhancing Waterfowl Hunting Access and Efficiency

At the end of the year, President Biden signed one of AFWA's top legislative priorities, the *Duck Stamp Modernization Act of 2023* (S. 788), after its unanimous passage through the Senate and an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote in the House. This was the culmination of an effort that began with AFWA's Waterfowl Working Group and subsequent formation of the e-Stamp Task Group to fix the issues related to the 45-day expiry period of the e-Stamp. Once implemented, the bill will authorize the electronic version of the Federal Duck Stamp for use through the entirety of a waterfowl hunting season, decreasing barriers to compliance and streamlining accessibility while preserving the rich history of the Duck Stamp artwork. The Association navigated concerns raised by our federal partners, advised on statutory language, and leveraged the support of our partners including the flyways and NGO partners like Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, and the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) to conduct a successful advocacy campaign on the Hill. We now shift our efforts to aid implementation in time for the 2024-2025 waterfowl season.



Restoring Archery, Hunter Education, and Wilderness Survival in Schools

The State of Alaska and the International Hunter Education Association brought forward an urgent need to restore access to Department of Education funding for archery, hunter education, recreational shooting, and other outdoor enrichment programming in schools. Administrative guidance from the Department had removed this eligibility due to an overlooked interpretation of the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*, leading to cancellation of certain programs in Alaska and creating a freezing effect on programs across the country. The Association and our coalition partners including CSF, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), and the National Archery in the Schools Program quickly rallied education and advocacy efforts for a legislative fix, leading to introduction and swift enactment of the *Protecting Hunting Heritage and Education Act* (H.R. 5110), which restored funding eligibility for these programs. In less than 24 hours, while the Directors were assembled for the AFWA Annual Meeting in Calgary, the measure passed the House (424 Y – 1 N), passed the Senate under Unanimous Consent, and was sent to the President for signature, showing the importance of these issues on Capitol Hill.



Protecting Conservation Appropriations and Increasing Funding Sources

With the U.S. government still functioning under a Continuing Resolution, we still await final numbers for FY24 appropriations. However, we are pleased to see the funding currently included in House and Senate Interior Appropriations bills for critical priorities such as State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, Migratory Bird Management, the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, Cooperative Research Units, and Wild Horse and Burro Management mostly level with FY23 numbers. While these will not see the increases we originally advocated for, level funding is an absolute success for the Association and our coalition partners in a budgetary cycle likely to bring significant drawdowns for other Interior programs.

Meanwhile, we continue to pursue increased funding for the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Fund (PR) with our support for the *Tax Stamp Revenue Transfer for Wildlife and Recreation Act* (H.R. 6352), which would reallocate 85% of the funds generated from shooting suppressor tax stamps to PR with the remaining 15% directed to expedite stamp processing. This funding, estimated at \$200 million for 2023, is currently deposited into the U.S. Treasury without any specific direction. This bill is a top priority for 2024, and we will be ramping up advocacy efforts with partners including CSF and NSSF.

Improving Wildlife Disease Management and Ensuring States Role in One Health

Increased attention from Congress on wildlife diseases and the potential for zoonotic pathogens opened the door for dedicated funding to bolster State agency capacity and hopefully replicate the model for collaboration established by the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study across other regions of the country. Capitalizing on this, the *Wildlife Disease Surveillance for Pandemic Prevention Act* (H.R. 6765) was reintroduced at the end of the year. The bill would authorize \$15.5 million annually to be distributed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to states based on a PR-like formula, as well as a \$3 million noncompetitive grant program for tribal partners. In addition to other authorizations and establishment of Federal task forces, it also facilitates voluntary partnerships via regional Centers for the Study and Diagnostics of Wildlife Diseases to provide technical assistance to States and Tribes, conduct research and development, and provide diagnostic services.

On the administrative side, efforts to ensure States are integrated into One Health continued with the release of the AFWA President's Task Force on One Health-Final Report, as well as public comments on the Centers for Disease Control National One Health Framework to Address Zoonotic Diseases. Due to direction secured in the *America's Conservation Enhancement Act* (ACE Act), the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA/APHIS) initiated review of the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Herd Certification Program Standards. AFWA and coalition partners offered detailed comments addressing the need for mandatory participation in the program across all types of captive facilities, restriction of live movement, and depopulation requirements. ACE Act implementation continued with the long-awaited initiation of the National Academies of Sciences study on CWD transmission and pathways, with an imminent report expected to pave the way for formation of the National CWD Task Force.

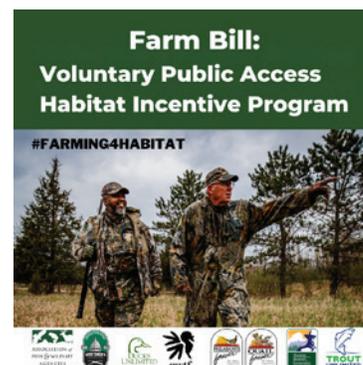




Advancing Conservation in the Farm Bill

With the Farm Bill extended through September 30, 2024, all core Farm Bill programs along with \$10 million dollars for the Voluntary Public Access (VPA) and Habitat Incentive Program and \$15 million for the Feral Swine Eradication Program will be funded. While we hope to see a draft bill and floor action in the first few months of 2024, the ongoing FY24 budget impasse may delay action until late Spring. One important marker bill the Association supports as a top priority is the *VPA Improvement Act* (H.R. 5186/S. 1161). The bipartisan bill would fund VPA at \$150 million (\$30M annually over 5-years), allowing expanded access for hunters and anglers across the country. If passed, this program would not only help outdoorsmen and women, but also local economies, as VPA averages an \$8.13 return to the economy for every \$1 invested.

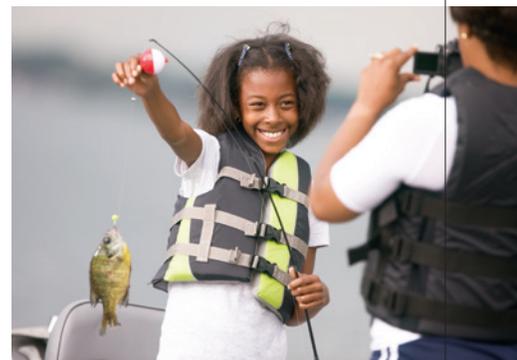
The other priority for the Association in the next Farm Bill is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The *Eliminating Needless Administrative Barriers Lessening Efficiency for Conservation Act* (H.R. 2975) would exclude State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) from the county cap limitations, allowing states to enroll more acres in their SAFE programs. In addition to this marker bill, the Association submitted feedback on CRP draft language to House and Senate Agriculture Committees which we hope to see reflected in the upcoming draft.



Ensuring Healthy Fish and Habitats and Increasing Angling Opportunities

Preparations for the 2024 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) began in earnest, with the Association settling on the following four requests for inclusion in the biennial legislation: reforming U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Project Partnership Agreements (PPA) to put non-Federal partners on equal footing, reducing the non-Federal match from 25% to 10% for Invasive Carp Deterrents in states containing the Tennessee and Cumberland River Basins, authorizing recreational use of USACE structures such as breakwalls and jetties, and reducing the non-federal match requirement from the current 50% to 25% for watercraft inspection and decontamination stations in authorized basins. The Association also joined a PPA reform coalition led by our partners at the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP) and the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA). The coalition held a PPA briefing on the Hill, which prompted the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to hold a hearing on the topic. The hearing was well attended and there appears to be significant interest in reforming PPAs. The Association also worked with an informal coalition of partners to raise concerns about provisions in S. 1521, the *Community and Hydropower Improvement Act*, that would limit the scope and application of environmental safeguards included in Part 1 of the Federal Power Act. In response to these and other concerns, the bill text was amended, and markup was postponed.

Fish health efforts included providing comments to USDA APHIS on the 2021-2023 National Aquaculture Health Plan and Standards to inform development of the 2024-2026 version and finalizing a Memorandum of Agreement with U.S. Geological Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to coordinate and collaborate on priority aquaculture drug research and data submittals to the Food and Drug Administration Center for Veterinary Medicine. The agreement renews the agencies' commitment to the Aquatic Animal Drug Approval Coalition which continues under the leadership of AFWA's Drug Approval Working Group.



Engagement with Federal Partners

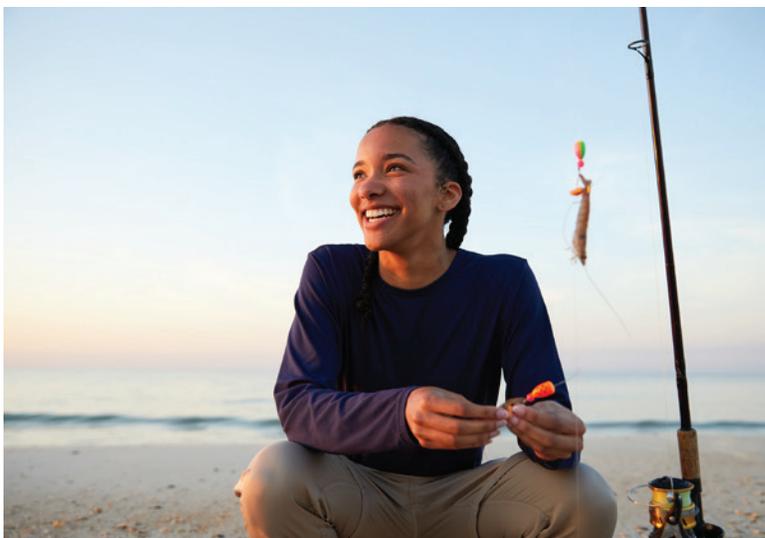
In addition to our work with Congress, the AFWA Government Affairs team actively engaged on a number of federal agency policy and rule making efforts. With the valuable assistance of state subject matter experts, the Association submitted significant comments on a series of proposed National Wildlife Refuge policies and rule makings related to use of lead ammunition and fish tackle, refuge planning and stepdown plans, biological integrity, diversity and ecological health, wilderness, and wild rivers. We hope that the Service gives thoughtful consideration to our feedback as they finalize these policies in 2024.

During the year we also engaged with our Federal partners on the ongoing implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, which infused billions of dollars related to aquatic and terrestrial connectivity and environmental resilience to state, tribal and NGO partners. Our focus in these efforts were to inform Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), make sure states were aware of these NOFOs, and ensure that the federal agencies were aware of state needs, perspectives, and capacity challenges. We also worked with our NGO partners to encourage coordination and collaboration amongst the Federal partners to maximize outcomes of this once in a generation funding opportunity.



LEGAL STRATEGY

It's been ten years now since AFWA's Legal Strategy program was established. In that time, we've kept our unceasing focus on maintaining states' wildlife management authorities, identifying new and emerging challenges for agencies and conservation partners, and supporting the essential work of AFWA's committees with research and analysis of all manner of legal considerations. In 2023 we concluded our two-year dialogue among stakeholders to assess the continuing relevance and significance of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation for states, tribes, nongovernmental organizations, hunters, and non-hunters, which culminated with a final special session, an AFWA resolution, and forthcoming publications.



Through our network of committees, programs, and partnerships, we also continued to educate current and aspiring wildlife professionals about state wildlife law, impactful Supreme Court opinions in environmental and administrative law, the latest in federal lawmaking and regulations, and AFWA initiatives relevant to attorneys and policy-focused professionals.

In 2024, AFWA counsel will continue to support our government affairs team by closely tracking federal legislation and rulemaking pertaining to federal aid in wildlife restoration and education, endangered species listing, delisting, and consultation, incidental take permits for migratory birds, and other issues of ongoing and emerging interest. We will also provide support for the work of the Legal Strategy Advisory Council (a.k.a. Think Tank), which concluded its three-year workplan (2021-2023) last year and is commencing new workstreams in consultation with the Executive Committee.

Whether by engaging with other AFWA committees on the work of the Think Tank or AFWA's Strategic Plan, or keeping our members informed of the rapidly changing field of conservation law, our network continues to provide legal and educational support to the Association's membership and critical partnerships such as the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles, America's Wildlife Conservation Partners, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and more.

With the critical input of directors and partner committees, AFWA counsel and the Legal Committee developed comments on federal legislative and regulatory proposals for the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, electronic duck stamps, and more. We also provided research and coordination for AFWA committees' work on topics including One Health, state/tribal collaboration, extending the federal excise tax to airguns, and the latest developments in animal law and animal rights litigation.

Finally, we continue to offer general legal services, including intellectual property protection, contract review, and organizational governance, to state fish and wildlife agencies, regional associations, flyway councils, and related organizations.

CONSERVATION INITIATIVES



BIRD CONSERVATION

Following a period of vacancy, Dr. Bradley Wilkinson was welcomed to the Association to lead the bird conservation program and coordinate the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). He has a strong scientific background in avian ecology and has been working to maintain the high level of relevancy brought to the bird conservation field by the Association and our partners.

As reported in the 2022 National Survey, over 96 million people spent time observing birds. The Bird Conservation Committee (BCC), together with our various working groups, remained dedicated to ensuring healthy and robust bird populations able to be enjoyed by all. This includes a recognition that birds need proactive conservation throughout their full annual cycle. With input from the BCC, the Association testified before Congress on the importance of funding conservation actions on the non-breeding grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean for migratory birds breeding in the United States, complementing the conservation work being done by our state members.



NABCI provided a forum uniting federal and state agencies with non-governmental partners to coordinate and prioritize bird conservation efforts at a national scale. In order to more easily integrate human dimensions into bird conservation programs, [A Guide to Incorporating Social Science in Bird Conservation](#) was released that will act as a resource for professionals to consult during planning and implementation of important projects. The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Community of Practice remains a strong component of NABCI, and in addition to hosting regular webinars, has been coordinating with the International Subcommittee to provide support to researchers working on full annual cycle conservation outside of the United States. Biannual NABCI meetings continue to be a venue bringing together conservation partners to discuss priority actions and develop products that will advance conservation at home and abroad.



Southern Wings

According to the National Survey, tens of millions of wildlife watchers, most of which observed birds, spent over \$250 billion in 2022. More than 350 of the birds they watched are migratory and require implementation of a full annual cycle conservation approach. To implement State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) objectives and complement state agency in-state investments, Southern Wings works with exceptional conservationists across the Hemisphere to implement comprehensive actions in critical locations for high priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). To date, 41 states have contributed over \$4 million to support the conservation of 81 SGCNs. This includes helping partners in Guatemala conserve over 11,000 acres that are used as stopover or nonbreeding habitat by hundreds of shared migratory birds; supporting private landowners in northern Mexico to conserve grassland habitat for Sprague's pipit, long-billed curlews, and grasshopper sparrow; working with coffee growers in Colombia to create conservation corridors for cerulean and Canada warbler conservation; and helping partners conserve areas in the Bahamas where 20% of the Atlantic population of the piping plover spend the winter.



Fall Flights and North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)

The *North American Waterfowl Management Plan* (NAWMP) is one of the most influential and ambitious wildlife conservation initiatives in North America. State fish and wildlife agencies are critical partners of the NAWMP and leaders in the conservation of waterfowl habitats. The NAWMP Committee initiated an effort to update the Plan by late 2024, and teams are working diligently to renew the goals and objectives for waterfowl populations, habitat, and hunter and wildlife viewers.



The *North American Wetlands Conservation Act* (NAWCA) provides federal funding to implement the NAWMP and federal funds must be matched by non-federal partners. The goal of the NAWCA program is to restore, enhance, and protect habitat for waterfowl and other wetland-dependent species across the continent—from breeding to wintering grounds. The project funding cap for U.S. Small Grants is \$250,000 and the U.S. Standard Grant project cap is \$3 million. More information is available at: <https://www.fws.gov/program/north-american-wetlands-conservation>



*North American Waterfowl
Management Plan*
*Plan nord-américain de
gestion de la sauvagine*
*Plan de Manejo de Aves
Acuáticas de Norteamérica*

State fish and wildlife agencies are leaders in waterfowl conservation through the Association's program known as *Fall Flights—Giving Wings to Cross-Border Waterfowl Conservation*. Fall Flights inspires State investments in the waterfowl breeding grounds in Canada to ensure a bountiful annual fall migration. The lower forty-eight states contributed a combined total of \$5,158,776 million to Canadian waterfowl habitat projects in 2022-2023. The Fall Flights program also reached a new milestone of cumulative state funding this year with a total investment of \$101,584,153 since 1991.

The Association, based on a recommendation of the Fall Flights Advisory Committee, established a new interim goal for states to invest \$10 million annually by 2031 and that all lower 48 states continue to invest annually in Canadian waterfowl habitat.

The Association's goal of \$10 million annually for Fall Flights is ambitious but it is soundly established on the habitat need in the Canadian breeding grounds. Based on currently available



information, new 5-year habitat goals for the Canadian Joint Ventures are to conserve 4 million acres at a cost of one billion Canadian dollars. The 20-year outlook will require the conservation of 14 million acres at an estimated cost of five billion Canadian dollars.

NATIONAL FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP

The National Fish Habitat Partnership (www.fishhabitat.org), implemented 95 fish habitat conservation projects across 24 states in 2023. \$5.8 million was contributed from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with partners contributing more than \$39.2 million. These projects represent a 5.7-to-1 leveraged funding match for federal funding with partnership project funding from other sources.

Since 2006, the National Fish Habitat Partnership has supported over 1,300 projects benefiting fish habitat in all 50 states. The National Fish Habitat Partnership works to conserve fish habitat nationwide, leveraging federal, state, tribal, and private funding resources to achieve the greatest impact on fish populations through priority conservation projects of 20 regionally-based Fish Habitat Partnerships.

Since 2006, National Fish Habitat Partnership projects have reconnected 6,000 miles of rivers and streams while conserving over 45,000 acres of river, lake, riparian, upland, estuary, and wetland habitat.

Many of these projects have been fostered through state fish and wildlife and natural resource agencies' coordination efforts. These projects are making a difference in conserving fish habitat and improving angling opportunities across the country.



Robert Boyles Selected as National Fish Habitat Board Chair, Replacing Ed Schriever

The National Fish Habitat Board (Board) will kick off its first meeting of 2023 with a new Board Chair. With the retirement of National Fish Habitat Board Chairman, Ed Schriever, the Board announced Robert Boyles, Director of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources as Chair, in January. Boyles was appointed in to the Chair held by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), which is designated to Chair the Board per the 2020 America's Conservation Enhancement Act (ACE Act). Mr. Boyles became the fifth Chairman of the Board following John Cooper (SD), Kelly Hepler (AK/SD), Tom Champeau (FL), and Ed Schriever (ID). Boyles is no stranger to the Board, having served as the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) Representative to the Board since 2022.

As Director of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Boyles serves as the chief administrator and is responsible for the management and supervision of the agency's five divisions. Prior to becoming Director, Boyles served as the Deputy Director of the Marine Resources Division from 2003 to 2019. During this time, he also represented South Carolina on several national and regional marine resources stewardship panels, served on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (2005-2012), and was the Vice Chair (2006-2009) and chair (2010-2011) of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.



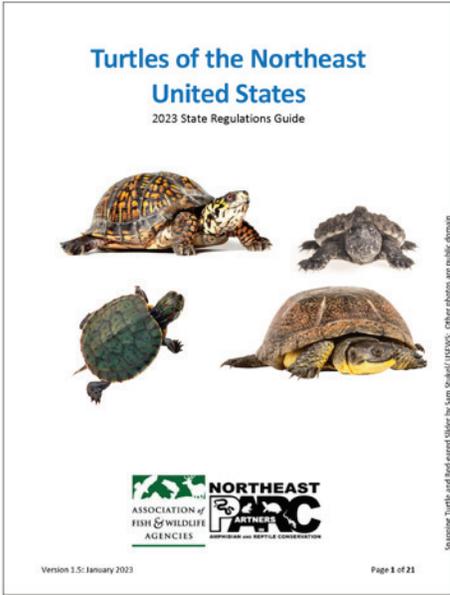
2023 WATERS TO WATCH

Annually, the National Fish Habitat Partnership highlights some of the best conservation projects implemented through our 20 partnerships across the country. These voluntary, locally-driven projects represent some of the top conservation activities completed or in progress. These projects are carried out under the goals and objectives of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. These conservation projects conserve freshwater, estuarine, and marine habitats essential to many fish and wildlife species. Projects like the ones represented on this list are fundamental to the overall success of the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

The below 10 projects were included in the Waters to Watch list in 2023:

- Annette Island, Metlakatla Indian Community, AK - Southeast Alaska FHP
- Finn Rock Run, OR - Pacific Lamprey Conservation Initiative
- Galena River Watershed, IL - Fishers and Farmers Partnership
- Island Park Reservoir, ID - Reservoir FHP
- Lower Heeia Watershed Restoration, HI - Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership
- Matheson Wetland, UT - Desert Fish Habitat Partnership
- Mid Klamath Tributary, CA - California Fish Passage Forum
- Native Fish Passage in the San Joaquin River, CA - California Fish Passage Forum
- Spread Creek, WY - Western Native Trout Initiative
- Big Lake, AK - Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership

For more information on project maps and descriptions of the “Waters to Watch” list for 2023, visit: <https://www.fishhabitat.org/waters-to-watch/>.



AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE CONSERVATION

The Committee has continued its focus on combatting the illegal trade in North American turtles alongside the Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation working group, the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT). Early in the year, the Committee worked with Northeastern herpetologists to produce *Turtles of the Northeast United States-2023 State Regulations Guide* which later spurred the revision of the former State of the Union Appendices. The Appendices detail commercial and personal collection regulations of wild herpetofauna across the United States and updated versions should be released in winter 2024. The Committee also facilitated virtual meetings focused on the 2022 *Resolution in Support of Enhancing Regulatory, Collaborative, and Strategic Capacity to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles*, recent research on Bsal (*Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans*), and recent changes to Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) listings for turtles.

PARTNERS IN AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE CONSERVATION (PARC)

Over the last year, PARC has been heavily focused on the illegal trade in turtles and disseminating information on herpetofaunal diseases. The Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) working group held a weeklong workshop for over 40 wildlife professionals focused on Illegal Turtle Trade Strategic Planning. The Disease Task Team (DTT) has been busy with hosting webinars such as *Pesky Pentastomes: Coming to a State Near You* and *Ranavirus: A Threat to Aquatic Wildlife*. The DTT also helped finalize an updated video on decontamination guidelines for biosecurity and published a paper in *The Wildlife Professional* on *Amping Up Biosecurity for Herps*. On the education and outreach front, PARC launched its new Amphibian and Reptile Education resource page, celebrated its largest #AmphibianWeek yet, and continued to grow #WildTurtleWeek. PARC's reach was so strong that #AmphibianWeek

was briefly a trending topic on Twitter, showcasing the wide reach of their messaging. Finally, a second video featuring Jeff Corwin was also released to highlight the negative impacts the illegal trade in turtles has on local populations, and a letter with multiple signatory partners was sent to film executives to highlight how the demand for pet turtles can increase poaching from the wild.



INVASIVE SPECIES

The AFWA Invasive Species Committee welcomed Dr. Nicole Angeli, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Division for the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources as the Committee Chair in January 2023. The Committee later supported her nomination to serve as an Ex-Officio on the newly reformed Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC). The Committee provided comments on the Aquatic Invasive Species Commission report released in early 2023 and participated in parts of the Aquatic Invasive Species in Commerce project and the Organisms in the Trade Working Group. Throughout the year, the Committee engaged



with members of the Department of the Interior on the developing national Early Detection, Rapid Response framework. As part of this work, Committee members attended several sessions and workshops to provide state-centered feedback and guidance on the framework and its many projects. In Spring of 2023, the Committee was also heavily involved in dissemination of information regarding crayfish and bullfrog hitchhikers in feederfish shipment going to pet stores around the country. This incident helped strengthen relations between the Committee, the pet industry, and the aquaculture industry.

FURBEARER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The AFWA Furbearer Conservation Technical Working Group continues to develop Best Management Practices for Trapping with our partners at the Wildlife Services' National Wildlife Research Center. In conjunction with this effort, we have also partnered with USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services in a project to investigate the prevalence of SCV2 in wild carnivore species. Research projects are being conducted in numerous states and over 450 animals from 19 species have been submitted for testing. Although experts are still learning about SARS-CoV-2 in animals, there is currently no evidence that animals play a significant role in spreading the virus to people. Based on the information available to date, the risk of animals spreading SARS-CoV-2 to people is low.

Human-Wildlife Conflict Working Group

The AFWA Human-Wildlife Conflict Working Group produced a Monograph on conflicts with coyotes in urban areas that will soon be published in the Human Wildlife Interactions/ Berryman Institute Monograph Series. Multiple authors from numerous agencies contributed. In addition, this group received a Multistate Conservation Grant to survey states about wildlife conflicts and how agencies fund and staff conflict management programs. This report will be available in March. The group is now working on another monograph sized publication on the topic of beaver conflict management. For more information contact AFWA staff Bryant White bwhite@fishwildlife.org.



WILDLIFE DIVERSITY CONSERVATION & STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLANS

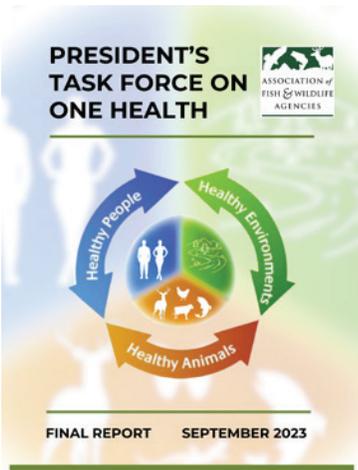
The Association continued its long-standing advocacy for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program. Bipartisan Dear Colleague Letters supporting funding for the program were signed by over 180 members of Congress. The program received \$73.8 million in FY23, a slight increase over the previous year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Science Applications Program is developing a dashboard that states could choose to use as their State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and a work group is developing guidance for states who opt to submit a virtual instead of a paper version of their SWAP for their required plan revision. Monthly SWAP Learning Series webinars and bimonthly virtual meetings of wildlife diversity program managers were held to provide resources, opportunities for discussion, and updates.





LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The Association and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Landscape Conservation Joint Task Force (JTF), co-chaired by Curt Melcher (OR) and Martha Williams (USFWS), met ~bi-monthly to support regional landscape conservation collaboration. The JTF assisted with the development of [regional landscape conservation priorities](#) and worked with the Department of Interior and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to link America the Beautiful Challenge Grant funding to those priorities. Discussions were also held with USDA Working Lands for Wildlife leaders to seek ways to link USDA funding to regional landscape conservation priorities. Recruitment for a full-time Landscape Conservation Coordinator was initiated to replace Ken Elowe who will be retiring in 2024.



ONE HEALTH AND FISH AND WILDLIFE HEALTH

The President's Task Force on One Health, co-chaired by Paul Johansen (WV) and Amanda Wuestefeld (IN), completed a [report](#) with twenty-four recommended strategies to guide the Association's work in the One Health arena. The report was approved at the September Business Committee Meeting. The recommendations are centered around policy, coordination, training, and science. A key recommendation was to stand up a new AFWA One Health Committee in 2024. The Association continued its collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Council of the States, and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials on a One Health Community of Practice. The AFWA Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative updated its charter and vision and revised the Fish and Wildlife Health Toolkit. Funding through the Inflation Reduction Act was made available by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to hire four regional fish and wildlife health coordinators and staff assisted with the second Fish and Wildlife Health Forum. Technical assistance was provided on a range of issues including chronic wasting disease, SARS CoV-2 in deer, white-nose syndrome, lead, and aquatic animal health.

SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

The AFWA Science and Research Committee and Social Science Subcommittee conducted a survey of states to identify barriers that impact work on invasive species, fish and wildlife health, climate change, and social science. The findings are intended to help inform priorities of the multistate conservation grant program, federal agencies, and regional landscape conservation collaboratives. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey provided significant funding through cooperative agreements to support the Association's work on amphibians and reptiles, birds, bats, pollinators and invertebrates, fish, invasive species, energy and wildlife, climate adaptation, fish and wildlife health, landscape conservation, and State Wildlife Action Plans.





ENERGY AND WILDLIFE POLICY

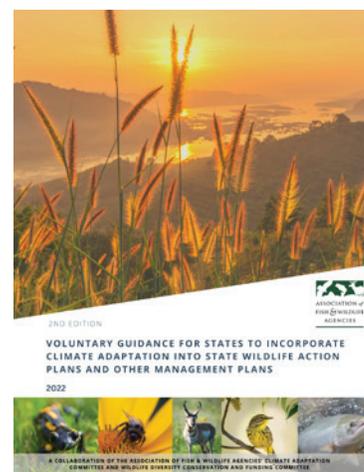
The AFWA Energy and Wildlife Policy Committee (EWPC) continues to work with states and partners to reduce impacts to fish and wildlife from energy development and generation in North America. The Committee's Wind Wildlife Working Group recommended and led the development of the *Communications Framework for Wind Energy Project Proponents and State Fish and Wildlife Agencies*, in collaboration with American Clean Power (ACP). The Committee approved a resolution to support and promote this Framework at the Annual Meeting in Calgary. The Committee's Solar Wildlife Working Group (SWWG) published the Solar Siting Survey final report on the AFWA website, with recommendations to aid state agencies with solar development, including improving interstate and other partner coordination, more regionally specific research, and developing a State Best Management Practices database. The EWPC continues to coordinate with federal and other partners including U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Energy, Renewable Energy Wildlife Institute, and ACP to promote information dissemination and collaboration.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

The AFWA Climate Adaptation Committee continues to support members' efforts to sustain fish and wildlife in a changing climate. The committee released its biennial [2022 Climate Adaptation Survey Report](#) documenting state agencies' perspectives on climate change, their capacity to address climate impacts, and the resources needed for managing fish and wildlife under future climate conditions. This year's survey marks 10 years of data collection and an ongoing focus is to identify trends in climate adaptation over the past decade to understand where future efforts should be targeted to best support AFWA members.

The Association continues leading the [National Fish, Wildlife, and Plant Climate Adaptation Network](#), along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society. The Network serves as a forum for coordination among state, federal, Tribal, NGO, and academic partners. The Network began revising the 2012 National Fish, Wildlife, and Plant Climate Adaptation Strategy. This strategy aims to provide guidance on advancing climate adaptation in natural resource management for the next decade.

AFWA's Climate Program celebrated the [Climate Adaptation Leadership Awards](#) at the AFWA Annual Meeting. [Thirteen winners](#) were recognized for increasing resilience of the nation's fish, wildlife, and plants.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH STRATEGIES



Project WILD

In 2023, Project WILD celebrated its 40th anniversary – and the millions of educators and youth the program has reached with conservation education in the past four decades! Some highlights of our WILD accomplishments in 2023 include:



- Over 9,500 educators across the country participated in WILD professional development training.
- 729 educators took advantage of one of five online courses offered in 2023, including a new mini course focused on bats.
- Project WILD continued work on an EPA-funded grant program, ee360+, to advance environmental education through a national collaborative led by the North American Association for Environmental Education.
- Project WILD staff hosted the 40th Annual Project WILD Coordinators' Conference in Anchorage, Alaska. In 2024, we look forward to co-hosting our coordinators' conference in collaboration with Project Learning Tree and Project WET!

- The Association sold a total of 16,391 WILD guides, an increase of 8% from 2022. Most guides sold are distributed through professional development training.
- The Association published Flying WILD: Birds Across the Curriculum, an activity module for grades 5-8 educators.
- Project WILD offered four webinars in honor of Earth Month, collaborating with fellow AFWA staff members to share their expertise with educators across the country:
 - Scales & Slime: Exploring the Roles of Amphibians and Reptiles
 - Win-win Opportunities: Nature-based Solutions to Help People and Wildlife
 - Renewable Energy and Wildlife
 - How Soil Health Impacts a Greater Ecosystem

Thank you for supporting Project WILD – in 2023, and for the next 40 years!
Learn more at projectwild.org.

Engagement Academy, Coffee Talk, and Fellowship

In North America, the social and ecological context for fish and wildlife conservation is changing rapidly and our fish and wildlife agencies are finding it harder to stay (or become) relevant in today's world. State agencies are working to better serve broader constituencies to ensure the future of North America's conservation legacy. An enriching workforce talent is needed to address current and impending habitat and nature challenges is critical not only to our natural resources, but also to our economy. Creating engagement in our work and volunteer cultures is paramount to addressing the support needed to properly address our fast-changing environment. To achieve this, enhanced education and collaboration opportunities for the organizations that serve those communities is essential.



Through a multistate conservation grant, the Education, Outreach and Diversity Committee is working to create voluntary guidance on how to build engagement and relevancy into the fabric of any conservation organization, create safe spaces to discuss uncomfortable questions and the lessons our community is learning, and fellowship opportunities to increase different ideas in our internal conservation teams. Through a grant extension, the Association is able to continue these effort and the results will be available in 2024.

Management Assistance Team (MAT)

The Management Assistance Team's (MAT) work is funded by a multistate conservation grant. MAT is charged with increasing the leadership capacity and agency effectiveness within state fish and wildlife agencies and the conservation community through leadership and organizational development initiatives, training, consulting, and support of the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI). In 2023, MAT provided training to a total of



2,262 individuals. MAT ran 30 webinars over 41 sessions for 956 students. The webinars offered in 2023 were: Boundary Setting for Work-Life Balance; Difficult Conversations and Dealing with Difficult People (offered five times); Breaking Down Stressful Situations; Inclusive Leadership: Creating Brave Spaces (revised); Cooperative Language (offered twice); Internal Dialogue; Conflict Resolution; Self-care; Emotional Intelligence; Plain, Simple, and Concise

Writing (offered twice); Mindfulness and Compassion in Conservation; Human-Nature Connection; Leading with Empathy; Social Location and Relevancy; Great Presentations with PowerPoint (new); Cultural Competency and Humility (offered three times) (new); Navigating Future Leadership: Cultivating Wellbeing-Centric Capacity (new); Leadership Influence and Philosophy (new); How to Hold Better Performance Feedback and Accountability Conversations (new); Feedback Fundamentals to Become an Even Better Leader (new); Courageous Cultures: How to Help Your Team Solve Problems Faster, and Surface Remarkable Ideas (new); Navigating Workplace Conflict: How to Have More Influence, Less Drama and Better Collaboration (new). Of these webinars, eight were new, and most of the webinars were offered multiple times to meet the needs of state agency personnel. MAT also conducted six online courses for 110 students consisting of five Topics: Adaptive Leadership Principles; Conservation Communication Strategies (revised); Leader as Communicator; Reflections on Agency Management; What Great Managers Know (offered twice). MAT continued to make available five on-demand webinars with 514 views and a new self-paced course, Presenting for Impact, with 207 participants. Additionally, 12 face-to-face workshops were held with 475 attendees: Adaptive Leadership Principles; Adaptive Leadership Challenge; Dealing with Difficult People; Emotional Intelligence; The Power of Storytelling; Leadership; Supervisor's Workshop; Public Participation; The Power of Inclusion (revised). Lastly, MAT provided consulting services to 12 agencies/organizations: Georgia, Illinois, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, and American Fisheries Society. Notable accomplishments in 2023 also included MAT's collaboration and partnership with a new vendor, Grow Your Own Leaders, to offer courses related to workplace performance and agency culture. For more information on MAT's products and services visit <https://www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-inspires/mat-team>.

National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) established in 2005 to help develop conservation leadership to address the daunting challenges facing our ever-changing world. Through intense and empowering learning sessions facilitated by top-ranked faculty, peer coaches, and peers, this premier leadership program provides conservation professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to address conservation's most pressing needs. Cohort 16 continued its leadership journey and graduated 33 individuals in June 2023 bringing the total NCLI Alumni to 562 strong. State agencies represented were AK, CA, CT, FL, GA, ID, MI, NV, OH, OR, PA, TN, WA, WI. Organizational makeup is 20 from state agencies, 8 from federal agencies, three from NGOs, one from industry, and one from a Native American tribe. COHORT 17 began its journey in October comprised of 32 participants; 20 from state agencies, six from federal agencies, four from NGOs, one from industry and one from NGO/tribal. State agencies represented were AK, AR, AZ, CA, FL, ID, IL, KY, MI, MO, NE, NY, OH, PA, SC, VT, WA, WI. Additionally, the NCLI BOARD welcomed David Buggs, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department; Karen Waldrop, Ducks Unlimited; and Emily Cope, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources as its latest board members. NCLI Alumni Engagement continued last year with the delivery of a 3-Day Virtual Alumni Conference (63 Attendees), two National Receptions, one Alumni Business Meeting, one NCLI Alumni / Board Town Hall, and two Alumni Committee Meetings. Additional NCLI activities included a live informational session for potential nominators and applicants to the NCLI, the Diversity Team partnered with the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society to offer a 1-hour introductory Adaptive Leadership Webinar, and the Diversity Scholarship partially funded tuition and subsidized travel for one C17 Native American participant. For more information on the NCLI, please visit www.conservationleadership.org.



**NATIONAL CONSERVATION
LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE**
COHORT 16 2022-2023



OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

MULTISTATE CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM

The Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP) was established through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Improvement Act of 2000. It is administered by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Each year, the MSCGP directs up to \$11 million to support projects supporting fish and wildlife conservation work done by state fish and wildlife agencies and other conservation organizations.

The 55 projects approved for 2023 (in addition to three obligated in previous years) focus on six strategic priorities identified by the Association's membership and were awarded \$13,220,376.

In 2023, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies launched the [Multistate Conservation Grant Program \(MSCGP\) Dashboard](#).

This platform provides a comprehensive overview of awarded MSCGP grants from the program's inception to the present year. Featuring over 450 previous grants, the dashboard is a great tool for applicants, offering a unique opportunity to explore the wealth of projects and initiatives that have received funding over the years.

Projects implemented in 2023 include:

- **Implementing Recommendations from the Wildlife Viewer Survey: Enhancing Relevancy and Engaging Support from a Broader Constituency - Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University**

With the support of a 2021 Multistate Conservation Grant, the Dayer Human Dimensions Lab at Virginia Tech, in collaboration with the AFWA Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group, conducted a National and Regional Wildlife Survey [Report available: <http://hdl.handle.net/10919/111539>].

In 2023, with the support of a second Multistate Conservation Grant, the Dayer Lab began facilitating a Community of Practice to address recommendation #4, supporting agencies in implementing results. A Community of Practice is a group of people who interact with each other continuously to share knowledge, resources, experiences, and expertise about a common interest. Through the Community of Practice, state fish and wildlife agencies have developed and implemented their wildlife viewing plans, based on recommendations from the survey for their region or state.

Virginia Tech and the state agencies are also developing a wildlife viewing toolkit website with materials for other states to use as templates in developing and implementing their own wildlife viewing projects. The website aims to inspire other state agencies and wildlife program practitioners to better serve wildlife viewers in pursuing their passion, connecting with agencies, and ultimately being inspired to conserve our wildlife resources.



- **USA Archery’s – Archery is for Everyone! social media campaign.**

USA Archery received a multistate conservation grant to create and execute Archery for Everyone! social media campaign with Marvel Entertainment, LLC in 2023. This grant aims to collaborate with partners to execute a nationwide social media campaign to generate awareness, interest, and excitement for archery and to convert that interest into on-the-ground try-archery event attendance, recruitment, and retention.

In partnership with Marvel Entertainment, USA Archery created an influencer video featuring TikTok influencer Female Peter Parker and 3-time Olympian Brady Ellison. Once Marvel posted the video, USA Archery also posted an organic post with the video, which was shared with all partners to share on their social media platforms, further driving awareness of Archery is for Everyone! Following the video was a Call to Action to “Find a Try Archery Event Near You” to Try Archery AND collect a FREE Marvel Steps of Shooting Poster between May 13th and September 15th, 2023. Each social media post provided a link to the online try archery locator.

More than 250 Try Archery events were registered in 38 states by 80 unique event hosts, including USA Archery clubs and other national archery organizations clubs, archery retailers, state fish and wildlife agencies, L.L. Bean, and more! The campaign’s overall performance across all platforms yielded substantial digital traction, amassing 2.8 million impressions and 2.6 million views across various social media platforms. An estimated 72,000 total social engagements evidenced significant audience interaction.

2023 ANNUAL MEETING

The Association held its 113th Annual Meeting, September 24-27, 2023, held an in person meeting in Calgary, Canada. Leading off the conference, the 2023 Plenary I Session: “Relationship Conservation Across Borders and with First Nation Communities.” This plenary session acknowledged that this is the first time the Association has brought its annual meeting to Canada in 35 years and to thank the Province of Alberta for making this meeting a reality. Curt Melcher, AFWA President, and Todd Loewen, Minister of Alberta Forestry and Parks, talked about the importance of coordination and collaboration for a broad suite of species and ecosystems across a shared international border. This session also affirmed the importance of First Nations as stewards of fish and wildlife resources in Canada and the importance of Reconciliation, a formal commitment to restoring meaningful and respectful relationships with First Nations and Indigenous communities. Dr. Leroy Little Bear, a professor at the University of Lethbridge, founding member of Canada’s first Native American Studies Department and member of the Blackfoot Confederacy from Kainai First Nation offered historical and traditional insights into the indigenous community’s relationship with nature and the land. Dr. Little Bear spoke to the impacts of the Anthropocene on the ecological role of the fish and buffalo.

The second plenary session, “Two Acts or Not to Act- Is That Really the Question?”, recognized the 50th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the United States and provided reflection on 20 years of Canada’s Species at Risk Act (SARA) with plenary speakers: Martha Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Dr. Justina Ray,

Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada. This was followed by a discussion on species that have cross-border conservation needs by panelists Sylvia D’amelio, Executive Officer, Trout Unlimited; Ken McDonald, Chief, Wildlife Division, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; and Dr. Greg Mitchell, Research Scientist, Wildlife Research Division, Environment and Climate Change Canada.

The Association thanks all our plenary speakers for their insights.

2023 Annual Meeting Resolutions

The voting membership of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies passed seven resolutions during its Business Meeting held on September 27, 2023. Resolutions are developed within AFWA Committees to express formal opinion for adoption by the Association.

1. Supporting the AFWA-ACP Communications Framework for Wind Energy Project Proponents and State Fish and Wildlife Agencies
2. In Support of a Strategic Plan for the U.S. Geological Survey’s Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Program
3. Federal Management and Oversight of Wild Horse and Burro Populations
4. Calling for Amendment of the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act to Include Airguns and Associated Ammunition
5. In Support of Collaboration Between State Fish and Wildlife Agencies and Departments of Transportation to Consider the Potential Impact of Transportation Structures on Bats
6. Recognizing the Value of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and Supporting Efforts to Address Contemporary Needs and Challenges
7. Appreciation to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas’ Fish and Wildlife Stewardship Branch for a Successful 113th Annual Meeting

[You can view the full text of the resolutions online.](#)





Annual Meeting Sponsors

The Association extends its appreciation to the 113th Annual Meeting Sponsors and exhibitors.

Sustaining Partner Level: Paylt Outdoors, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Platinum Level Sponsors: Bass Pro Shops, Ducks Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited Canada; National Wild Turkey Federation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture- Wildlife Services

Gold Level Sponsors: Aspira, Brandt, Bureau of Land Management, Garcia Environmental Services, Kalkomey, NASA, National Audubon Society, National Shooting Sports Foundation, North American Non-Lead Partnership, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture- Natural Resources Conservation Services, Yellowstone of Yukon Conservation Initiative

Silver Level Sponsors: Alberta NAWMP Partnership, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Archery Trade Association, Esri, NRA Hunter Services, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, U.S. Geological Survey

Bronze Level Sponsors: Airgun Sporting Association, Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Fish and Game Association, American Feeders, Anavah Consulting LLC, Archers USA, Avenza Systems Inc., Boone and Crockett Club, DJ Case & Associates, Gordon-Darby, Interior Federal Credit Union, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, Mule Deer Foundation, National Archery in the Schools Program, Southwick Associates, The Natural Trust of British Columbia, The Wildlife Society, Tyler Technologies, Voss Signs, Wildlife Management Institute

Special Event Sponsors: American Sportfishing Association

Exhibitors: Agents of Discovery Inc., Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Animex International, Law Offices of Lowell E. Baier, National Conservation Leadership Institute, Natural Power, Responsive Management, Timmons Group, Wildlife Analytics Lab



2023 Annual Awards

The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) recognized nine individuals, two state agencies, one federal agency, and one private landowner for their dedication to advancing fish and wildlife conservation at the Association's Annual Awards Ceremony held on September 26, 2023, in Calgary, Canada.

Recipients include:

Seth Gordon Award

Sara Parker Pauley, Missouri Department of Conservation

John L. Morris Award

Joan Blankenship

Ernest Thompson Seton Award

Dr. Andrew H. Raedeke, Missouri Department of Conservation

Boone and Crockett Award

Nicole Nichols, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Mark Reeff Award

Justin Grider, Alabama Wildlife & Fisheries Division

Private Lands Fish & Wildlife Stewardship Award

Josiah Austin, Cienega Ranch

Stephen Kellert Award

Tom Wilcox, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

Conservation Law Enforcement Award

Virginia Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) Advisory Council

Special Recognition Awards

Megan Wisecup, Iowa Department of Natural Resources
 Silvana Yaroschuk, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
 Thomas Decker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

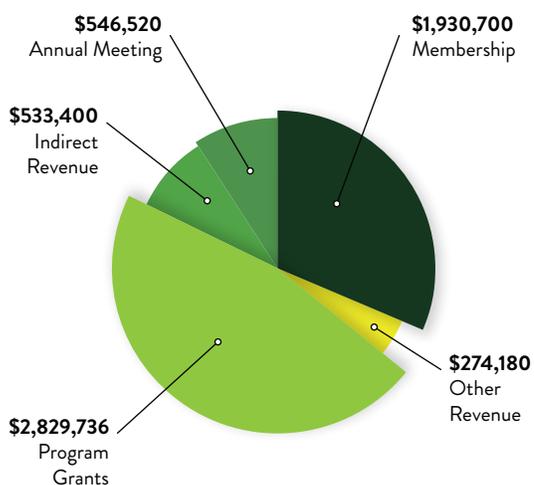
The Association would like to pay tribute to the wildlife professionals, Fallen Heroes, who have lost their lives while carrying out their duties to enforce conservation laws and regulations and to manage fish and wildlife resources within the past year. This deceased professional is Senior Investigator Kyle Patterson of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

2023 FINANCIALS

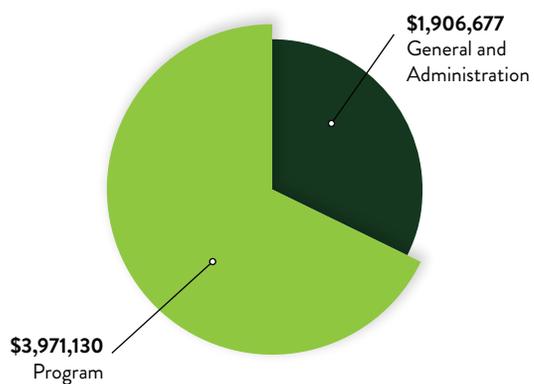


The funds entrusted to the Association enable us to provide coordinated services; support for international programs, projects and coalitions; promote wildlife associated recreation; and help members continue to address the most pressing conservation challenges of the day.

2023 Revenue



2023 Expenses



The Association's independently audited financial statements and IRS 990 are available upon request.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

State	30%
Provincial/Territorial	<1%
Associate	<1%
Affiliate	<1%
Contributing	<1%

GRANT REVENUE

Federal	18%
Multistate	19%
Foundational	1%
International	4%

OTHER REVENUE

Annual Meeting	9%
Misc. State Contributions	3%
Overhead	9%
Miscellaneous	4%

TOTAL REVENUE	\$6,115,000
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TOTAL EXPENSES	\$5,878,000
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STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

With the current AFWA Strategic Plan expiring in 2025, President Curt Melcher and the AFWA Executive Committee determined that it would be prudent for the Association to assess the adequacy of the current strategic plan (2021-2025) for a possible extension, rather than launching a new strategic planning effort this year. The current strategic plan was updated in 2021 after a yearlong effort of intensive interaction with AFWA members.

Association staff initiated a review of the plan and determined that the current plan is sound, relevant, current, inclusive of our priorities and work, and directs and reflects how AFWA staff go about accomplishing that work. However, it was observed that some minor but important updates to the current plan, that reflect some recent and emerging priorities, would be appropriate. Thematically, those areas are Organizational Excellence, Values, One Health, and Tribal Engagement.

In December 2023, the AFWA Executive Committee approved the proposed updates, and the Directors will review and consider the changes for adoption at the March 2024 AFWA Business Meeting in Grand Rapids, MI, that is held in conjunction with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. If approved, the changes would be incorporated into the Strategic Plan and the plan would be extended through 2027.

INDUSTRY RELATIONS

Thanks to our industry partners, states leverage dollars from hunting and fishing licenses to use the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund and the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, which continue to be the foundational pillars of the American System of Conservation Funding. These funds are administered via the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR), through which over 35.5 million acres and 9,000 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are maintained and operated, with research, monitoring, and inventory conducted for more than 500 species of birds and mammals and 200 species of fish. The program supports approximately 300 state hatcheries producing over 1 billion fish, with more than 8,900 areas operated and maintained for public boating and fishing.



Partner With A Payer

An initiative of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program with state and industry partners

Partner with a Payer strengthens the ties between the people who make a successful conservation partnership work – the manufacturers that pay excise tax through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Acts, the state agencies that conserve wildlife and habitat across the country, and the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Partner with a Payer

The Partner with a Payer initiative (PWP), a communication collaboration between WSFR, industry, and the Association, increases awareness and understanding of the achievements enabled by excise tax funds and strengthens relationships across all sectors of the partnership. A critical communication element of this partnership is the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (Survey), which is funded by a multistate conservation grant. While the tools and methodologies change, the Survey has been conducted since 1955 and is one of the oldest and most comprehensive continuing recreation surveys. In 2023, the 2022 National Survey was published, showing over 148 million wildlife watchers, 14 million hunters, 47 million target shooters, 39 million motorized boaters and almost 40 million anglers participated in 2022, spending \$394.8 billion on their activities. Also in 2023, PWP worked with state fish and wildlife agencies to use funding from WSFR grants for education signage on WMAs, target shooting ranges, fishing sites, and hatcheries.

Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) Update

Participation rates in outdoor activities – including hunting, angling, boating, and target shooting – continue to evolve, presenting unique challenges and opportunities for state agencies and the overall community to adapt to. An openness to change is critical for R3 efforts to be successful. As an association, several states, agencies, and partners are involved in advancing R3 efforts, many of which have been established over the past 10 years. One particular advancement is at least 36 states, including the District of Columbia, now have at least one R3 point of contact either for hunting and shooting sports or angling, and in several cases, both. In 2023, the Association reconstituted a President's Task Force dedicated to Angler R3 to update a report that was developed in 2018. The AFWA President's Task Force on Angler R3 will be developing new recommendations for states, as well as providing insights into the importance of states to have customer relationship management (CRM) tools to utilize in recruitment, retention, and reactivation initiatives that states are implementing. This report will be released in 2024.



THE ASSOCIATION COMMITTEES, SUBCOMMITTEES & WORKING GROUPS

Almost without exception, the accomplishments of which the Association are most proud started within our 70+ committees, subcommittees and working groups, and our 1,000+ committee members. Without a doubt, the Association's success in advancing positions that further our collective capacity to manage resources will only continue thanks to the enduring personal contributions of the greater Association membership.

Agricultural Conservation Committee

Conservation Reserve Program Working Group

Environmental Quality Incentives Program / Conservation Stewardship Program Joint Working Group

Farm Bill Easements Working Group

Forestry Working Group

Private Lands Working Group

Public Access Working Group

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Working Group

Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Committee

Angler & Boater R3 Committee

Annual Meeting/Awards Committee

Audit Committee

Bird Conservation Committee

Bird & Fish Related Conflict Working Group

Grassland Working Group

Harvest Information Program (HIP) Working Group

Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Working Group

Partners in Flight/Shorebird/Waterbird Working Group

Resident Game Bird Working Group

Waterfowl Working Group

Climate Adaptation Committee

Education, Outreach & Diversity Committee

Diversity & Inclusion Working Group

Education Working Group

Outreach Working Group

Project WILD Subcommittee

Wildlife Viewing & Nature Tourism Working Group

EOD/WDCF Joint Working Group

Energy and Wildlife Policy Committee

Solar Wildlife Working Group

Wind Wildlife Working Group

Executive Committee

Federal and Tribal Relations Committee

Wild horses & Burro Working Group

Finance Committee

Fish & Wildlife Health Committee

Lead and Fish and Wildlife Health Working Group

Aquatic Animal Health Working Group

AFWA SARS CoV-2 Working Group

Fish and Wildlife Trust Funds Committee

Federal Assistance Coordinators Subcommittee

Trust Fund Collection Working Group

Fisheries & Water Resources Policy Committee

Bird & Fish Related Conflict Working Group

Drug Approval Working Group

Fish & Wildlife Coordination Act Working Group

Subcommittee on Water

Hunting and Shooting Sports Participation Committee

International Relations Committee

CITES Technical Working Group

Invasive Species Committee

Feral Swine Working Group

Law Enforcement Committee

Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact

Leadership and Professional Development Committee

Legal Committee

Legislative and Federal Budget Committee

National Grants Committee

Multistate Conservation Grant Program

Nominating Committee

Ocean Resources Policy Committee

Resolutions Committee

Science and Research Committee

Human Dimensions and Social Science Subcommittee

Shared Science and Research Priorities Working Group

Sustainable Use of Wildlife Committee

Furbearer Conservation Technical Working Group

Technology & Data Committee

Threatened and Endangered Species Policy Committee

ESA and Climate Change Working Group

Wildlife Diversity Conservation and Funding Committee

Bat Working Group

EOD/WDCF Joint Working Group

Pollinator and Invertebrate Conservation Working Group

State Wildlife Action Plans Databases and Dashboards Working Group

Wildlife Resource Policy Committee

Human/Wildlife Conflict Working Group

PHOTOGRAPHERS

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Additional Featured Photos: Archery Trade Association (pg. 2, 3, 29); Northeastern Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (pg. 4, 5, 7, 24); Mossy Oak (pg. 6, 36); Arizona Game & Fish Department (pg. 8); Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (pg. 9, 17); Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (pg. 10); New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (pg. 10); California Department of Fish and Wildlife (pg. 11, 22); Bowhunting United (pg. 11); Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (pg. 12); Chuck Aaron (pg. 13); Recreation Boating and Fishing Foundation (pg. 13, 15); Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (pg. 14); Christopher Baker (pg. 16); Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (pg. 16); Fisheries & Farmers Partnership (pg. 19); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (pg. 20, 31); National Park Service (pg. ps. 21); Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division (pg. 21, 26); Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (pg. 22); Mark Nenadov (pg. 23); Jesse Adams (pg. 25); Evan Lanier (pg. 28); Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association (pg. 30); New York State Department of Conservation (pg. 32, 37); Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (pg. 34).

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