

**Fisheries and WATER rESOURCES pOLICY COMMITTEE**

Chair: Jim Fredericks (ID)

Vice-Chair: Craig Bonds (TX)

Thursday, March 13

1:15pm – 3:15pm

90th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference

Louisville, Kentucky

**Subcommittee and Working Group Reports**

* Subcommittee on Water – *Julie Carter, AZ*
  + Received a Government Affairs update
  + Received an update on the National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation and Management project, formerly known as the Instream Water Level and Conservation Training Center project.
  + SOW members highlighted GSA’s cancellation of many leases, including sites used for USGS water monitoring.
  + The group held a roundtable discussion, discussing various water quality and quantity challenges states are facing. These include droughts prompting low flows in hatcheries and contributing to unseasonable wildfire/grass fires across different parts of the country.
  + States also mentioned difficulties with hydropower facilities not adhering to their FERC licensing requirements. This is something that also came up on the virtual pre-meeting.
  + Discussed how SOW can better position itself to respond to new federal legislation that may affect states’ ability to protect water quality and quantity within their borders.
  + The subcommittee offers its support to FWRPC on these matters and also would like to remind FWRPC that the Instream Flow Council, through its formal relationship with AFA, can provide scientific and technical assistance on policy issues.
* Drug Approval Working Group – *Alan Johnson, IA*
  + The DAWG met on March 8 in New Orleans during Aquaculture 2025. Attendance was lower than usual, but 3 drug sponsors did attend. The working group discussed AFWA-DAWG Tier Drug Status Updates and then discussed progress on finding a new antibiotic option for aquaculture.
  + AADAP will present the results of the unmet drug needs survey at the next FDA CVM-ADAC (FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine-Aquaculture Drug Approval Coalition) meeting, a virtual meeting scheduled for April 10. This was originally planned for the March 8 meeting in NOLA, but AADAP staff were not permitted to attend.
  + If it is of interest to the committee, the DAWG will work with AADAP to make a bulleted brief of survey results to share.
  + The DAWG membership is down and the working group is actively seeking new members. Any assistance from FWRPC in recruiting new members would be greatly appreciated.
* Fish & Wildlife Coordination Act Working Group – *Jen Sheehan, AR*
  + Lightly attended in person, however group very active outside of meetings.
  + Met Jason Miller USACE connection with Water project reviews. USACE holds quarterly meeting. Jen will have an opportunity to offer a state perspective on the ACT.
  + Jen referenced a 2003 MOA between USCAE and FWS, and AFWA has looked at a similar MOA potentially with the ACOE
* Aquatic Animal Health and Aquaculture Working Group – *Ali Schwaab, AFWA*
  + National Aquatic Animal Health Plan draft currently in development.
    - being developed jointly by the USFWS, NOAA, AND USDA APHIS
    - intention is for this to replace the USDA-centric National Aquaculture Health Plan & Standards document on which AFWA previously provided feedback.
  + important to keep emphasizing the FWS’s contributions in the aquaculture and fish health space
  + discussed how state agencies can better inform the public of state regulations for the movement of aquatic animals
  + Next steps for a survey of state fish health operations.
    - intention is to collect baseline information from state agencies on their fish health operations relating to state hatcheries, wild fish, and private aquaculture
    - help working group identify priority areas of focus and inform work planning.
  + Concluded with a roundtable discussion of fish health updates across the regions. No major fish health issues were identified; most updates referenced routine issues
  + discussion of recent efforts underway in a number of state legislatures to ban importation and use of live baitfish
    - stem from a paper recently published by Upstream Alliance, which is funded by animal rights activities
* Bird Fish Related Conflict Working Group
  + There is interest in organizing a virtual call among those fish chiefs who are interested in discussing the current authorized take permit system and any other bird/fish conflicts not currently addressed.
  + The purpose of the virtual meeting will be to identify needs and priorities among fish chiefs before reaching out to the bird committee to revitalize the group.

**National Fish Habitat Partnership Update** – *Ryan Roberts, AFWA*

* America’s Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Reauthorization Act
  + On December 23rd, the America’s Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act (ACE Act) was signed into law by President Biden.
  + Passage of the ACE Act ensures the continuation of some of the nation’s most successful conservation programs, including the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP).

**Government Affairs Update** – *Ryan Roberts, AFWA*

* Budget
  + Still no FY25 appropriations bills and CR expires March 14
  + House has passed a 7-month CR (HR 1968), now decision rests with the Senate
  + Latest news suggests Senate Democrats may oppose the bill and are still pushing for a 30-day CR to allow for full FY25 bills to be negotiated.
  + FY26 Budget: Despite no FY25 budget, we are still moving into the FY26 budget process. This uncharted territory and we don’t expect to see a President’s Budget until April, so we are proceeding with our usual asks until we receive any direction. For fisheries, this includes funding for key programs of FAC, including the National Fish Hatchery System, National Fish Passage Program, AIS, and AADAP.
* Legislative Updates
  + Sporting Good Excise Tax Modernization Act
    - The bipartisan legislation was introduced by Representatives Panetta (D-CA) and Moore (R-UT) to make online marketplaces accountable for collection of the excise tax on archery and angling equipment sold directly to consumers from outside of the U.S. by online vendors.
    - Will close a significant gap in the collection of taxes for the Wildlife Restoration and Sport Fish Restoration Trust Funds.
    - Likely to be included in a reconciliation package that will move earlier this year, but we have also included the text in the draft legislation to reauthorize sport fish as a backstop.
  + Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission Act of 2025 (H.R. 1514) Introduced
    - On February 24, Congressman Mike Ezell (R-MS) and Congressman Troy Carter (D-LA) introduced the Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission Act of 2025 to establish the Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission.
    - The Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission will serve as a basin-wide, collaborative, and science-driven body, that will work with federal agencies, state governments, and local stakeholders to tackle challenges such as aquatic invasive species, habitat degradation, and water quality concerns.
    - Modelled on the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, the Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission would be a federally funded entity that provides grants and resources for habitat restoration, fishery research, and invasive species mitigation. Basin state agencies and Indian tribes that manage MS River Basin fisheries are eligible to join, as well as the USGS, USFWS, USACE, and TVA.
  + Reauthorization of Sportfish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund
    - the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF) must be reauthorized every five years and the current authorization expires at the end of FY26.
    - AFWA has been working with the Angling and Boating Alliance, an informal coalition of organizations representing those who pay into the fund and those who administer and benefit from the fund, to develop legislation to reauthorize the SFRBTF.
    - After a year of discussion, the Alliance has agreed on a platform and draft legislative text to reauthorize the fund. We are now sharing the platform with congressional offices, securing sponsors, and we expect the legislation will be introduced later this spring. Based on previous reauthorizations, the bill will eventually be incorporated into the larger surface transportation bill.
    - Changes- reduce tax on aerated bait buckets, switch interstate fisheries commissions to percentage (that amounts to small increase), add sustainable fuels criterion for boating infrastructure grants, state boating act, and placeholder for FET slippage (seen as the pay-for for the reduced tax on aerated bait buckets and increase for interstate fisheries commissions)
* Administrative Updates
  + Cuts to Federal Workforce
    - Probationary layoffs, now planning for large reductions in force across many federal agencies.
    - Delays and service delivery interruptions are to be expected. This includes the administration of Federal grants.
    - Please share your experiences with the AFWA GA team if you have any examples of how these cuts have impacted your work.
  + EO’s
    - Freeze on grants
      * On January 27 the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a memo that proposed to freeze or pause federal grants. Federal agencies were instructed to conduct a review to determine whether federal loan and grant programs are impacted by the wave of executive orders signed during President Trump’s first week in office.
      * A number of lawsuits followed.
      * The broadbrush freeze is now lifted and funds should be moving. The only grant programs still experiencing a freeze are those funded through the IRA.
      * If you are hearing form partners or staff that there are still concerns or delays with specific federal funding programs at the state level, please let us know.

**Roundtable on Fisheries/Water Funding Issues and Priorities** – *All*

**American Fisheries Society Update** *– Jeff Kopaska, AFS*

* Standard methods, hatchery methods, Fishes of Puerto Rico.
* Publisher is Oxford now, moved away from Wiley.
* Black Bass meeting 2025
* Annual meeting in San Antonio in August will highlight the 75th anniversary of Sportfish Restoration Act

**Federal Partner Updates** *– TBD*

* Read FWS updates and SFR Act Flyer (no FWS attendance)
* BLM provided in-person update:
  + Working through many of the Sec orders and Exec Orders programmatically.
  + Largest land manager federally.
  + Aquatics program update – FY 25 priorities conservation, Invasive

species mgmt.. water rights, restoration training, 300 miles of streams worked on in 2024.

* + BLM was able to receive four categorical exclusions National park service CX, 2 FWS CX’s.
  + Appreciate the support of state and conservation partners

**Wrap-up Discussion** – *Jim Fredericks (ID)/All*

* AFWA Letter to support USGS Stream Gauging
* Support for USGS Co-op units
* Rotenone –
  + meeting in DC with EPA. Set up small group meeting beforehand.
  + Trying to get an extension.
  + Liquid formulation is still not for sale commercially yet. Packaging issue that needs to be resolved.
  + Ali should bring up state rotenone availability inventory at a future state fish calls.
  + Colorado has antimycin.