HUMAN WILDLIFE CONFLICT WORKING GROUP

Meeting Minutes

91st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference

Hilton Columbus Downtown

Columbus, Ohio

Chair: Brian Wakeling (Montana)
Vice-Chair: vacant

Monday, March 30, 2026
3:30 PM - 5:30 PM

Agenda

- **Call to Order/Review Agenda/Introductions (Brian Wakeling)**
  - The meeting was called to order; ~40 working group members and guests attended

- **Approval of Minutes from the previous meeting (Brian Wakeling)**
  - The Minutes from the previous meeting during the AFWA Annual Meeting in Tucson, Arizona were unanimously approved

- **USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services (Jessica Fantinato, Deputy Administrator**)

  - Jessica Fantinato, Deputy Administrator, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, provided an update on several emerging and ongoing wildlife damage management issues being addressed by Wildlife Services (WS) and the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC):

- **Black-bellied Whistling Ducks:** Wildlife Services is responding to increasing agricultural conflicts associated with expanding populations of black-bellied whistling ducks, particularly damage to grain and rice production in the southern United States. Large concentrations of these birds can consume newly planted or ripening grain and create substantial localized losses. The species has adapted readily to agricultural landscapes, creating a growing need for effective, practical damage-management approaches.

- **Black Vultures:** Black vulture populations and associated conflicts continue to increase and expand geographically. Wildlife Services is addressing livestock depredation, particularly attacks on newborn calves and lambs, as well as infrastructure and human-health concerns. Large vulture roosts can create unsanitary conditions through accumulations of feces and regurgitated material, while birds roosting on electrical transmission structures can contribute to equipment damage and power outages. WS continues to provide technical and operational assistance and to evaluate management strategies for these conflicts.

- **Golden Eagles and Lamb Depredation:** The National Wildlife Research Center's Utah Field Station continues research related to golden eagle conflicts with livestock production. Work is intended to improve understanding of eagle predation and identify effective approaches for reducing losses while meeting

federal protections for golden eagles. Lamb depredation remains an important concern for sheep producers in portions of the West.

- **Common Ravens in Nevada:** Wildlife Services continues working with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, USGS, and other partners to manage elevated raven populations in priority greater sage-grouse habitat. Management is targeted to areas where raven predation may adversely affect sage-grouse nesting success and recruitment and includes monitoring and carefully targeted removal. This work is being conducted as part of a broader science-based effort to evaluate the effectiveness of raven management for sage-grouse conservation.

- **Crested Caracaras in Texas:** Wildlife Services continues to receive reports of crested caracara conflicts with livestock, particularly lambs, in Texas. Because caracaras are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, options available to individual livestock producers are limited without appropriate federal authorization. WS is working with producers and partners to document depredation and identify lawful approaches for addressing these conflicts.

- **Grizzly Bears:** Wildlife Services continues to assist federal, state, Tribal, and livestock-producer partners with grizzly bear conflicts in the Northern Rockies. As bear populations occupy broader areas, livestock depredations and other human-bear conflicts remain an important management concern. WS provides expertise in investigating suspected depredations and, where authorized, implementing management actions to reduce recurring conflicts.

- **BLM and M-44 Memorandum of Understanding:** Wildlife Services continues coordination with the Bureau of Land Management under the agencies' wildlife damage management MOU. The amended agreement prohibits use of sodium-cyanide M-44 devices on BLM-administered public lands. The restriction applies specifically to M-44s and does not prohibit other authorized predator-damage management techniques on BLM lands.

- **Feral Swine:** Feral swine remain one of Wildlife Services' most significant invasive-species challenges because of their impacts on agriculture, natural resources, property, and animal and human health. The National Feral Swine Damage Management Program continues coordinated surveillance, population reduction, disease monitoring, research, and eradication efforts. Since establishment of the national program in 2014, feral swine have been eliminated from a number of states, while intensive management continues in states with established populations.

- **New World Screwworm:** New World screwworm was a major emerging concern for USDA in spring 2026 because of its northward spread through Mexico and the potential threat to U.S. livestock and wildlife. USDA was intensifying surveillance, preparedness, sterile-fly capacity, and coordination with states and Mexico. In April, APHIS released an updated national response playbook outlining procedures for surveillance, movement controls, treatment, eradication, and interagency coordination should screwworm be detected in the United States.

- **Wolf Depredation on Livestock:** Wildlife Services continues to play an important role in investigating suspected wolf depredations and assisting livestock producers with wolf-conflict management. WS works with state wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tribes, and producers to verify livestock losses and implement appropriate nonlethal and, where legally authorized, lethal management actions.

- **Mexican Gray Wolf – Standards of Evidence:** Wildlife Services has continued efforts to improve consistency and transparency in investigations of suspected Mexican gray wolf livestock depredations in Arizona and New Mexico. Following concerns surrounding changes to the standards of evidence used in depredation determinations, WS has emphasized training and workshops to improve consistency among investigators

and understanding among cooperating agencies and livestock producers regarding how evidence is evaluated and depredation determinations are made.

- **Mexican Gray Wolf Management:** Wildlife Services remains an active member of the Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team and works closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, White Mountain Apache Tribe, and other partners. WS personnel assist with livestock-depredation investigations, trapping and radio-collaring wolves, relocations, and other management actions intended to reduce conflicts while supporting Mexican wolf recovery.

- **Wolf Pursuit and Livestock Myopathy Research:** The National Wildlife Research Center is investigating whether repeated pursuit or harassment of livestock by wolves can result in physiological effects or conditions similar to capture or pursuit myopathy, even when livestock are not physically attacked. The research is intended to improve understanding of potential indirect impacts of wolf-livestock interactions—including stress, exertion, injury, and possible production losses—and ultimately provide managers with better scientific information for evaluating the full consequences of wolf conflicts with livestock.

- **Update: Berryman Institute (Julie Young, Berryman Institute Director)**

  - Dr. Julie Young serves as the Executive Director and provided an update on the activities of the Berryman Institute at Utah State University.

- The Berryman Institute continues to focus on developing practical solutions to challenges at the intersection of humans and wildlife through **research, education, outreach, and collaboration**. Partnerships among academic institutions, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, scientists, educators, students, and communities remain central to translating research into applied human-wildlife conflict management practices.
- The **Human-Wildlife Interactions journal** continues to have substantial international reach. During the reporting year, readership included more than **3,800 institutions in 199 countries**, with more than **94,000 downloads**. Since 2018, journal content has received more than **596,000 downloads** from 10,840 institutions across 222 countries/regions.
- Human-wildlife conflict publications continue to receive considerable use, including resources addressing **black bear, wild pig, deer, free-ranging cat, and urban coyote conflicts**, demonstrating continued demand for applied information on managing wildlife conflicts.
- Work continues on major Berryman Institute publications. The **beaver monograph** has moved into the layout/proof stage, with publication anticipated toward the end of spring 2026. Production of the **cougar book** is also progressing, with approximately one-quarter of the book laid out and proofs returned and another quarter prepared for layout; work on remaining chapters was expected to continue through spring and summer.
- Outreach activities included the **2025 Wild Aware Utah Day at the Zoo**, conducted with Utah's Hogle Zoo and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, with another event planned for 2026. The Institute also hosted a collaborative workshop with Utah State University Extension and continued expanding public outreach through numerous news and media opportunities.
- Additional outreach included new partnerships with the **Swaner Center, Botstiber, and Utah Wildlife Federation**, hosting guest speakers, and conducting a movie night and panel discussion to encourage broader engagement on wildlife conservation and human-wildlife interaction issues.
- Student education and professional development remain important components of the Institute's work. Activities included an **annual undergraduate scholarship**, initiation of the USU Dark Sky Monitoring Group,

student participation in state and national The Wildlife Society conferences, MNR and undergraduate certificate opportunities, internships and partnerships, and other hands-on educational experiences.

- Faculty research activity remained strong, with **four grants in 2025 and three in 2026**, participation in professional conferences including TWS, UACAA, WAFWA, and VPC, and several dozen publications. Institute faculty also continued professional service through organizations including the Utah Wildlife Federation, Yellowstone to Yukon, and the **IUCN SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group**.
- Looking ahead, the Berryman Institute plans to **develop an external Advisory Board** and identify additional partners to support program expansion and provide financial support for its research, education, and outreach activities.

- **Update on AFWA conflict papers: (Brian Wakeling/Bryant White)**

    - **Managing Conflicts with Beavers publication (in press)**
        - The HWCWG discussed the progress on a couple of ongoing projects. The first was the previously approved conflict practices associated with beaver management, which has been accepted for publication by the editors. We anticipate page proofs to be distributed shortly and publication soon thereafter.

    - **Managing Conflicts with Wolves publication (need approval of outline)**
        - We anticipate a first full draft for review by September. We will request review comments back by about January 1, 2027. We will address comments and have a final draft for approval distributed before the North American Conference in March 2027. We anticipate requesting approval at that meeting.

    - **Managing Cougars in North America (WAFWA)**
        - Another topic discussed was the progress on the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Cougar Management Guidelines that is being produced by Berryman Institute and of great interest to many agencies. The current timeline for production is end of calendar year 2026.

- **Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment for the Use of Wildlife Damage Management Methods by APHIS-Wildlife Services (Bryant White)**
    - The HWCWG also discussed ongoing Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessments for Use of Wildlife Damage Management Methods that members often provide for USDA Wildlife Services. 34 reviews of various physical and chemical methods used in the management of wildlife damage have been completed to date. A request for review is likely to come that addresses the use of drones. Working Group members were thanked for their assistance in completing previous reviews as this greatly increases their review and adoption for management practices many states depend on.

- **Roundtable: State/Federal/Tribal/Provincial/Regional Associations/AFWA Members and Guests**
    - The meeting completed with a quick round robin of recent activities and conflicts being addressed by each agency and organization.

    - Oregon- Staff attended a Wildlife Human Attack Response Training (WHART) in British Columbia, Canada. A suspected attack on a person by a wolf turned out to be an attack by a dog

    - Mississippi State University- Continue research on feral swine damage management and deer crop depredation.

- Florida- Revised trapping rules to align with AFWA Best Management Practices for Trapping recommendations. 2 human fatalities from alligators. One human fatality by a black bear. Coyote attacks on humans in urban areas have been occurring. Rabid otters attacked a person canoeing. Many conflict with invasive species including iguanas, Burmese pythons, tegu and Nile monitors.

- Idaho- Grizzly bear attacks on livestock are a continuing concern. Elk damage to agriculture continues. Developed own forensics lab. Sending staff to WHART training.

- Montana- Grizzly bears, moose, and even river otters, along with wolves and wild turkeys continue to create conflicts.

- Minnesota- Deer, elk, turkey, wolves, and geese continue to create conflicts. Attacks on humans by black bears. The use of BearWise messaging is helping reduce conflicts. Compensation for crop damage is occurring.

- Ohio- There was a black vulture die off HPAI which will affect permitting for take to reduce damage. Whitetail deer does have attacked humans to protect fawns resulting in targeted removal. This has occurred in other states as well.

- Missouri- Updating WHART training. There have been attacks on humans by river otters. The Large Carnivore Response Team have been investigating how to reduce dealing with fake AI created images.

- New York- Peanut the Squirrel episode had repercussions for other species. Encouraged agencies to make sure policies and procedures are up to date.

- Defenders of Wildlife-Promoted new non-lethal initiatives being conducted by Wildlife Services.

- Kentucky-Trying to eradicate feral swine. Banned hunting of feral swine. Dealing with members of the public illegally taking wildlife into captivity.

- A rancher from Montana- Indicate that he very much appreciated the work of Wildlife Services assisting with depredation issues.

- Colorado- Many issues that require cooperative efforts of state, federal and private conflict management contractors.

- Botstiber Institute- Continues to work on wildlife fertility control methods

- Rhode Island- Have many conflict issues with black bears but hunting to reduce the population is currently not allowed and there is no political appetite to develop a hunting season.

- **Wrap-up Discussion and Assignments for Next Meeting (Brian Wakeling)**
    - The group will continue to develop the draft document on managing conflicts with wolves.