

FY 2027 Multistate Conservation Grant Program Strategic (MSCGP) Priorities

Eligible project activities include those allowable under the Wildlife Restoration Act and Sport Fish Restoration Act, including research, planning, restoration, species or habitat management, technical assistance, policy coordination, professional development, and other activities that support the conservation of **wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish**¹, and their habitats. Other eligible activities include those that provide for public use and benefit from bird, mammal and sport fish resources such as Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) for hunting, target shooting and fishing, trapping, hunter education, aquatic education, public access improvements, research and evaluation pertaining to these activities, and other activities consistent with the enabling legislation, supporting the ability of state fish and wildlife agencies to carry out projects under the Wildlife Restoration Act (WRA) and Sport Fish Restoration Act (SFRA).

Eligible, science-driven projects under Priorities 1 and 2 must directly support the implementation of established national or regional conservation plans for **eligible wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish**. The projects must benefit 26 or more states or more than half the states in a U.S FWS or AFWA regional association. Such plans must be those already reviewed and approved by state fish and wildlife agency policymakers, such as but not limited to:

[AFWA's Fish & Wildlife Health Initiative Toolkit](#)

[Eastern Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan, 2025-2034](#)

[National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative 2.0](#)

[Sagebrush Conservation Strategy](#)

[Wild Sheep Initiative](#)

[Western Grasslands Initiative](#)

[Presidential Task Force on Trapping Policy Final Report](#)

[National Fish Habitat Action Plan \(3rd edition\)](#)

[Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture](#)

[Western Native Trout Initiative](#)

[Wildlife Movement and Connectivity Initiative](#)

[State Wildlife Action Plans](#) – (The projects must benefit 26 or more states or more than half the states in a U.S FWS or AFWA regional association)

[Conservation Strategy For Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in the States of Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming – 2009 \(update near completion\)](#)

[National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan](#)

(Note: These are examples only. Other plans have been completed and approved by state fish and wildlife agencies at the national or regional level.)

¹ *Sport fish* means aquatic, gill-breathing, vertebrate animals with paired fins, having material value for recreation in the marine and fresh waters of the United States.

1. Landscape Scale Habitat Connectivity

- A. Integrating State Connectivity Needs into Working Lands Conservation
- B. Addressing Adaptive Management from Existing Connectivity Plans
- C. Building Support for Connectivity Strategies Among Key Partners and Stakeholders

2. Management and Applied Research

- A. Applied research to Address Priority Knowledge Gaps
- B. Science-Based Management Tools, Techniques, & Interventions
- C. Multistate Coordination to Implement Existing or Newly Established Plans
- D. Fish & Wildlife Health Science & Management

3. Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3)

- A. Marketing and Engagement
- B. Hunting, Fishing, and Target Shooting Access and Infrastructure

4. AFWA Priorities Identified in AFWA Funding Principles (submitted by ExCom)

- A. National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Watching
 - B. AFWA Facilitated National Priorities
 - Management of the MSCGP Program
 - Professional Development and Capacity Building for WRA and SFRA Programs Delivery
 - National Conservation Coordination
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1. Landscape Scale Habitat Connectivity

- A. Integrating State Connectivity Needs into Working Lands Conservation
- B. Addressing Adaptive Management from Existing Connectivity Plans
- C. Building Support for Connectivity Strategies Among Key Partners and Stakeholders

Definition: Landscape-scale habitat connectivity refers to the planning, management, and implementation of actions that maintain or improve the ability of **wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish** to move across landscapes and aquatic systems to meet life-history needs, respond to environmental change, and sustain viable populations.

Eligible projects must:

- ✓ Demonstrate multistate or regional impact;
- ✓ Demonstrate how it directly advances implementation of existing, state- or regionally endorsed connectivity or conservation plans; and
- ✓ Directly benefit eligible species and activities allowable under the Wildlife Restoration Act and Sport Fish Restoration Act, consistent with AFWA guidance.

Given the broad use of the term “connectivity,” applicants are reminded that not all landscape-scale connectivity plans or actions are eligible. Proposals must clearly identify the eligible species, conservation actions, and statutory authority under which the work is proposed.

Rationale: States and regional associations have invested significant resources in developing landscape-scale connectivity plans. However, implementation, adaptation, and long-term applicability of these plans now represent the greatest shared need.

State fish and wildlife agency leadership identified three strategic focus areas where MSCGP funding can be most effective:

- ✓ Address private lands as a limiting factor for landscape connectivity;
- ✓ Support adaptive management and delivery of existing multijurisdictional plans; and
- ✓ Build acceptance and support for connectivity strategies among key partners and stakeholders who can help remove barriers to implementing the plan.

A. Integrating State Connectivity Needs into Working Lands Conservation

Private lands play a disproportionate and critical role in maintaining habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. Proposals must demonstrate how state-identified connectivity needs for birds, mammals, and sport fish are integrated into working-lands planning tools, where private land use is a limiting factor for conservation success.

Projects should enhance voluntary, incentive-based conservation by helping landowners, producers, and partners align agricultural practices with habitat connectivity outcomes while maintaining viable operations.

Potential Proposal ideas (examples only):

Integrating state-identified habitat connectivity priorities for wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish into agricultural, forestry, and rangeland planning tools used by landowners and producers, enabling voluntary alignment of working-lands practices with connectivity outcomes (e.g., SWAPs integrate state-identified connectivity needs for eligible SGCN into agricultural, forestry, and rangeland planning tools used on private lands).

Developing multistate spatial decision-support tools that identify priority connectivity areas for wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish on private lands and translate those priorities into practical, incentive-compatible conservation actions eligible under WRA and SFRA (e.g., Wild Sheep Initiative integrates private-land movement corridors and fence or grazing management considerations into working landscapes adjacent to occupied and potential habitat).

Supporting multistate coordination to incorporate terrestrial and aquatic connectivity needs for wild birds, wild mammals and sport fish into existing working-lands conservation programs (e.g., grazing systems, crop rotations, riparian management, irrigation infrastructure) where private land use limits connectivity (e.g., Western Grassland Initiatives support cross-boundary grassland connectivity on agricultural and grazing lands critical to grassland birds and mammals).

Identifying and prioritizing private-land focus areas of regional significance for wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish to strategically target voluntary habitat conservation, restoration, and management actions funded through WR and SFR (e.g., National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative 2.0 supports landscape-scale connectivity among focal and anchor landscapes by aligning farm and ranch management with bobwhite movement and habitat needs).

Integrating aquatic connectivity needs for sport fish into agricultural landscapes by aligning voluntary practices such as culvert upgrades, riparian buffers, and water-management infrastructure with state-identified movement and habitat priorities (e.g., Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture aligns voluntary land-use practices with cold water stream connectivity and riparian habitat priorities across multiple states, Western Native Trout Initiative incorporates aquatic connectivity needs into agricultural water management, riparian practices, and barrier modification on private lands).

Developing regionally consistent guidance for landowners and conservation partners that links farm- and ranch-scale management decisions to broader, multistate connectivity objectives for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish.

B. Addressing Adaptive Management from Existing Connectivity Plans

Many regional and multistate connectivity plans are complete or nearing completion, but now face challenges related to implementation, monitoring, and adaptation to current landscape conditions. Proposals should move beyond plan development to support adaptive management and on-the-ground delivery of approved plans that advance connectivity outcomes for wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish.

Projects must be multijurisdictional in both impact and participation, with active involvement from multiple state fish and wildlife agencies.

Key considerations:

- ✓ Proposals should identify specific gaps, uncertainties, or implementation barriers within existing plans.
- ✓ Actions should be grounded in current ecological, social, and land-use conditions, rather than aspirational or historical restoration targets alone.
- ✓ Projects may leverage existing connectivity frameworks referenced in existing plans to develop prescriptive, actionable solutions.

Potential Proposal ideas (examples only):

Identifying implementation gaps, uncertainties, or barriers within existing state or regional connectivity plans and developing multistate, prescriptive actions to address those gaps under current ecological and land-use conditions.

Supporting adaptive implementation of priority connectivity actions identified in existing plans by evaluating on-the-ground outcomes, species responses, and feasibility, and refining management approaches accordingly (e.g., *Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture supports adaptive restoration and barrier mitigation strategies that respond to changing stream conditions and land use*).

Advancing multistate monitoring and data-sharing systems that support adaptive management of connectivity actions for birds, mammals, and sport fish, including movement, habitat condition, and barrier effectiveness (e.g., *AFWA's Fish & Wildlife Health Initiative Toolkit supports adaptive management by integrating disease surveillance, population health indicators, and risk assessment into connectivity implementation*).

Applying updated spatial, land-use, and infrastructure data to reassess and refine connectivity priorities in existing plans, ensuring actions remain relevant to contemporary development, agricultural practices, and environmental change (e.g., *Western Native Trout Initiative refines aquatic connectivity priorities using updated hydrology, barrier data, and climate conditions to guide adaptive implementation. Or, Sagebrush Conservation Strategy moves from strategy to implementation by reassessing priority corridors and bottlenecks under current development and land-use pressures*).).

Coordinating multiple state fish and wildlife agencies to implement and evaluate connectivity actions across jurisdictional boundaries, such as migration corridors, aquatic passage improvements, or habitat linkages identified in existing plans (e.g., *Wild Sheep Initiative evaluates and adapts corridor, crossing, and habitat linkage actions based on observed movement and landscape change*).

Developing consistent technical guidance and implementation frameworks that help states move from connectivity planning to coordinated, on-the-ground delivery using WR and SFR funding

C. Building Support for Connectivity Strategies Among Key Partners and Stakeholders

This sub-priority focuses on building understanding and support for connectivity strategies for wild birds, wild mammals and sport fish among key partners and stakeholders who play a direct role in removing implementation barriers. The goal is to strengthen existing plans by inviting new ideas, tools, and support that make them more practical and actionable. Engagement will extend beyond technical details to include targeted outreach to those whose involvement is essential for success.

There is a recognized need to extend engagement beyond the technical and analytical audiences traditionally involved in connectivity planning and to increase outreach, communication, and voluntary adoption of plan-identified conservation strategies.

Proposals should focus on translating existing connectivity plans for wild birds, wild mammals and sport fish into stakeholder-facing narratives, decision frameworks, and engagement pathways that support on-the-ground implementation and adaptive management.

All research and engagement must be developed in collaboration with, and in service to, State fish and wildlife agencies.

Potential Proposal ideas (examples only):

Translating existing connectivity plans into stakeholder-focused narratives, decision frameworks, and outreach materials that clearly communicate why connectivity matters for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish, where actions are needed, and how partners can contribute.

Developing engagement strategies that support voluntary adoption of plan-identified connectivity actions for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish by landowners, producers, local governments, conservation districts, and other key partners (e.g., *the Eastern Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan engages private forest landowners and forestry partners using clear, non-technical messaging tied to plan-identified connectivity needs*).

Conducting targeted human-dimensions research, in collaboration with state fish and wildlife agencies, to understand partner and stakeholder motivations, constraints, and decision-making processes related to connectivity implementation for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish.

Creating practical communication and engagement tools that help state agencies and partners explain connectivity priorities for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish in ways that resonate with non-technical audiences and support on-the-ground participation (e.g., *Sagebrush Conservation Strategy expands engagement beyond technical audiences to ranchers, counties, and local partners essential to corridor implementation*).

Supporting multistate peer learning, workshops, and technical exchanges that build shared understanding and capacity among agencies and partners responsible for implementing connectivity strategies for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish (e.g., *the Wild Sheep Initiative*

engages transportation agencies, landowners, and local partners to build support for corridor protection and movement-friendly infrastructure).

*Developing and testing stakeholder engagement pathways that directly reduce barriers to implementation, such as lack of awareness, misalignment with land-use objectives, or uncertainty about benefits and incentives (e.g., *Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture develops stakeholder-facing tools that communicate the importance of coldwater connectivity and voluntary restoration approaches*).*

2. Management and Applied Research

- A. Applied research to Address Critical Knowledge Gaps
- B. Science-Based Management Tools, Techniques, & Interventions
- C. Multistate Coordination to Implement Existing or Newly Established Plans
- D. Fish & Wildlife Health Science

Definition: Management and Applied Research refer to science-driven projects that directly support the implementation of established multistate or regional conservation plans for eligible **wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish**. Such plans must be those that have already been reviewed and approved by state fish and wildlife agency policymakers. This category focuses on actionable research, management tools, and coordinated strategies that address specific biological or ecological needs identified in approved plans.

Rationale: State fish and wildlife agencies across the country face complex management challenges driven by habitat loss, invasive species, disease, and changing land uses. Many of these issues affect species ranges that cross state boundaries, requiring shared science, consistent approaches, and coordinated implementation. Existing regional and multistate conservation plans outline priority actions but often require targeted research, improved management tools, and collaborative capacity to move from planning to effective implementation. The Management and Applied Research priority ensures that MSCGP resources are invested in projects that accelerate conservation actions, standardize science-based practices, and strengthen collaboration across jurisdictions—ultimately improving the conservation status of wild birds, wild mammals and sport fish at the scales where meaningful biological impact occurs.

Key considerations:

- Projects must produce deliverables that clearly advance conservation outcomes for eligible species—either by filling critical knowledge gaps or by developing, refining, or implementing management practices that can be applied at scale across multiple states.
- If your proposal includes creating a database, please outline a clear plan for its long-term sustainability. Databases often require ongoing maintenance and funding beyond the grant period. Without a strategy for continued support—such as identifying future funding sources, partnerships, or integration into existing systems—the database may

become inactive once the grant ends. We encourage applicants to address how the database will remain functional and accessible after the project concludes.

A. Applied Research to Address Critical Knowledge Gaps

Support multistate or regional research that addresses critical biological, ecological, health, or management questions identified in approved conservation plans (e.g., population drivers, disease impacts, habitat use, or responses to management). Research must directly inform conservation actions for eligible wild bird, wild mammal, or sport fish species. Projects under this category primarily generate new empirical evidence and are not required to produce tools, protocols or practices during the project period.

Potential Proposal ideas (examples only):

Monitoring Effectiveness and Design: Evaluate the performance, sensitivity, and comparability of alternative population monitoring, occupancy survey, genetic assessment, or health surveillance approaches across multiple states to determine which methods best detect population trends or health signals for wild birds, wild mammals, or sport fish (e.g., *Eastern Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan 2025-2034*, *Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI)*, *Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV)*, *National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) 2.0*).

Decision-Making and Spatial Prioritization Research: Assess how different spatial prioritization approaches, model assumptions, or data inputs influence conservation outcomes such as habitat restoration effectiveness, connectivity gains, or invasive species control across state boundaries for wild birds, wild mammals, or sport fish (e.g., *Sagebrush Conservation Strategy*, *Western Grasslands Initiative*, *WNTI*).

Management Strategy Evaluation: Test and compare the biological and ecological responses of target species to alternative habitat or stressor management strategies—including invasive plant control, water-quality improvements, or disease vector management—to identify conditions under which specific approaches are most effective in landscapes important to wild birds, wild mammals, or sport fish (e.g., *Wild Sheep Initiative*, *Sagebrush Conservation Strategy*, *EBTJV*).

B. Science-Based Management Tools and Techniques

Develop, refine, or implement management practices, decision-support tools, monitoring protocols, or assessment methods that advance priority conservation actions for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish in existing national or regional plans. Projects should provide actionable guidance that improves on-the-ground outcomes for eligible species. Projects under this category must result in tools, protocols, or practices that are ready for adoption by managers during or immediately following the project

Potential Proposal ideas (examples only):

Standardized Monitoring Protocols: Develop and implement multistate protocols for population monitoring, occupancy surveys, or genetic assessments of target species (e.g., NBCI 2.0, Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan).

Decision-Support Tools: Create or refine spatial prioritization tools to guide habitat restoration, connectivity investments, or invasive species management across state boundaries (e.g., Western Grassland Initiative, WNTI, EBTJV).

Birds, Mammals, and Sport Fish Health Tools: Develop rapid-response protocols, sampling kits, or diagnostic tools to support multistate coordination during wild bird, wild mammal or sport fish health events (e.g., AFWA Fish and Wildlife Health Toolkit, Wild Sheep Initiative).

Best Management Practices (BMPs): Test and document effective strategies for enhancing the population status of eligible species (e.g., Sagebrush Conservation Strategy, NBCI 2.0).

C. Multistate Coordination to Implement Existing or Newly Established Plans

Strengthen coordination, capacity, and shared implementation across states or regions to accelerate delivery of actions outlined in approved conservation plans. This may include collaborative working groups, shared data systems, technical support, professional development, or cross-jurisdictional strategies that enhance the conservation status of wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish.

Potential Proposal ideas (examples only):

Collaborative Conservation Networks: Establish and support state fish and wildlife agency working groups or technical committees to coordinate plan implementation, share data, and align management actions across multiple states (e.g., EBTJV, WNTI, Wild Sheep Initiative).

Cross-Jurisdictional Data Systems: Build or expand shared databases for tracking eligible species population trends, habitat conditions, disease surveillance results, or restoration outcomes (e.g., Sagebrush Conservation Strategy, NBCI 2.0).

Training and Capacity Building: Provide workshops or technical support to agency staff and partners to consistently apply science-based management strategies and fish and wildlife health strategies for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish across states (e.g., Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan, Western Grassland Initiative).

D. Fish & Wildlife Health Science

Support multistate applied research, data systems, and management tools that strengthen wildlife health monitoring, early detection, and response capacity, as integrated from AFWA's Fish and Wildlife Health Initiative Toolkit. Projects should align with regional or multistate conservation plans that identify health threats—such as pathogens, parasites, environmental toxins, invasive species, or other ecological stressors—as priority management challenges for

wild birds, wild mammals, or sport fish. Note that human health impacts are not eligible for funding and should not be referenced as a need, purpose, objective, result or benefit.

Potential Proposal ideas (examples only):

Wildlife Health Surveillance Systems: Develop or enhance coordinated monitoring protocols, diagnostic capacity, and shared data platforms for tracking health indicators and disease trends for wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish across states (e.g., AFWA Health Initiative Toolkit, Wild Sheep Initiative).

Rapid Response Planning & Exercises: Create multistate response frameworks, communication toolkits, and field-response protocols; conduct tabletop or field drills for simulated health events affecting wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish (e.g., AFWA Health Initiative Toolkit).

Diagnostic & Laboratory Capacity: Establish regional partnerships, develop shared testing resources, or provide technical training to improve detection of pathogens or environmental health stressors affecting wild birds, wild mammals or sport fish (e.g., EBTJV, WNTI).

Workforce Training & Professional Development: Provide multistate training in field sampling, necropsy, biosecurity, and communication to build a more consistent and effective health response workforce for wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish.- (e.g., AFWA Health Initiative Toolkit).

3. Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3)

- A. Hunting, Trapping, Target Shooting and Fishing Marketing and Engagement
- B. Hunting, Target Shooting and Fishing Access and Infrastructure

Definition: This priority supports coordinated, multistate efforts to recruit new participants, retain existing participants, and reactivate lapsed participants in hunting, trapping, target shooting, and fishing. R3 projects focus on increasing awareness, improving participant experiences, expanding access and opportunity, and applying research-based strategies to ensure these activities remain relevant and accessible across audiences.

Rationale: Sustained participation in hunting, trapping, target shooting, and fishing is essential to conservation funding, public engagement, and long-term stewardship of fish and wildlife resources. Enhanced and sustained participation in these activities will also correlate to increased purchases of equipment taxable under federal law, thereby increasing funding available for fish and wildlife conservation. Effective R3 efforts require collaboration among state agencies, NGOs, industry partners, and other stakeholders, as well as investments in staff training and organizational capacity to implement programs at scale. This priority emphasizes projects with defined outcomes, evaluation components, and plans for long-term sustainability, while encouraging alignment with prior MSCGP funding, strong industry relations, and translation of research into practical, on-the-ground applications.

A. Hunting, Trapping, Target Shooting and Fishing Marketing and Participant Engagement

Strengthen coordinated, multistate approaches to marketing, outreach, mentoring, and engagement that increase participation, build social support, and improve long-term retention in hunting, trapping and target shooting, and fishing.

Potential Proposal Ideas (examples only):

Applied Marketing Research & Testing: Conduct applied research and real-world testing of messages, campaigns, and outreach strategies to better understand participation drivers and inform effective R3 implementation.

Coordinated R3 Campaigns & Communication Tools: Develop, expand, or implement regional or national marketing campaigns, toolkits, and communication resources that support consistent, scalable R3 messaging across states and partners.

Mentoring & Participant Pathways: Design and implement mentoring, instructional, or volunteer-based programs that support participant progression, peer support, and sustained engagement.

Technology-Enabled Engagement Solutions: Develop or apply scalable technologies and adaptable engagement tools that expand reach, improve participant experiences, and support large-scale participation efforts.

R3 Training and Capacity Building for Program Implementation: Develop and deliver training, professional development, and implementation support that builds agency and partner capacity to plan, deliver, evaluate, and sustain effective R3 programs.

R3 Best Practices Translation & Training: Translate R3 research and proven practices into practical guidance, training, and resources for state agency practitioners, NGOs and Industry Partners including lessons learned from prior MSCGP awards.

B. Hunting, Target Shooting and Fishing Access and Infrastructure

Improve coordination and capacity to expand, enhance, and connect participants to safe, accessible hunting, trapping, fishing, and target shooting opportunities, including the development and modernization of range infrastructure.

Potential Proposal Ideas (examples only):

Access Planning & Best Practices Development: Develop best practices, guidelines, or planning tools to improve access, accessibility, safety, and regulatory compliance at hunting areas, shooting ranges (including indoor shooting ranges catering to urban target shooters), and fishing access sites.

Range Infrastructure Development and Modernization: Support planning, design, renovation, or coordinated development of public and partner-supported target shooting range infrastructure that improves safety, accessibility, capacity, and user experience while supporting R3 outcomes.

Access Mapping & Digital Connectivity Tools: Enhance or develop shared mapping platforms, digital tools, and virtual resources that connect participants to participation opportunities across jurisdictions.

Partnership- and Industry-Based Access Initiatives: Foster coordinated partnerships among state agencies, federal agencies, local governments, NGOs, and industry partners to advance access-related R3 strategies, including shared investment, expertise, and long-term stewardship.

Access Use & Experience Evaluation: Evaluate use patterns and participant experiences at public hunting areas, shooting ranges, and fishing access sites to identify improvements that support participation and retention.

4. AFWA Priorities Identified in AFWA Funding Principles (submitted by ExCom)

- A. National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Watching
- B. AFWA Facilitated National Priorities
 - Management of the MSCGP Program
 - Professional Development and Capacity Building for WRA and SFRA Programs Delivery
 - National Conservation Coordination

Definition: This priority supports projects that strengthen AFWA’s national leadership role in coordinating fish and wildlife conservation under the Wildlife Restoration Act (WRA) and Sport Fish Restoration Act (SFRA). It includes activities that enhance state agency capacity, advance professional development, improve national and international policy coordination, and ensure effective administration of the Multistate Conservation Grant Program.

This priority also includes actionable AFWA work products and initiatives that are guided by existing, state-approved plans or formal AFWA actions, including work advanced through prior AFWA business meetings, Presidential Task Forces, or other Association-directed efforts. These projects are typically national in scope, plan-based, and implementation-oriented, but do not align with the science-implementation focus of Priorities 1 or 2, nor the participant-focused objectives of Priority 3.

Eligible activities under this priority may include professional development, policy and legal training, coordination frameworks, and implementation support that advance approved AFWA priorities or task force recommendations. These activities supported under this priority must be directly and demonstrably tied to improving state fish and wildlife agencies’ ability to carry out eligible activities under the WRA and SFRA. While some professional development activities are delivered through the AFWA Management Assistance Team (MAT), this priority also

encompasses AFWA-approved training, seminars, and capacity-building efforts that are not delivered by MAT, such as policy, legal, or governance-focused initiatives.

Rationale: AFWA and its members play a critical role in advancing coordinated conservation nationwide. AFWA provides leadership, training, policy guidance, and technical support that help state agencies implement WRA and SFRA programs more effectively. In addition to science-based conservation delivery and R3 efforts supported under other MSCGP priorities, state agencies have identified a continued need for Association-led, plan-based initiatives that address legal frameworks, governance, policy consistency, and workforce readiness at a national scale. This priority ensures MSCGP resources can support approved AFWA actions and task force-driven work that strengthen institutional capacity, improve coordination, and enable states to carry out their statutory responsibilities more effectively. This category is intended for grants to the Association based on the Association's established funding principles, which limit the amount of funding that can be awarded to AFWA under the program. USFWS and survey vendors will also submit under this priority to conduct and coordinate the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Watching.

Proposals submitted under this priority:

A. National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Watching (move it first)

The National Survey is a critical source of scientific data for state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, informing policy, planning, budgeting, and understanding the role of fishing, hunting, and wildlife-related activities in Americans' lives. It collects information on participation, demographics, economic impacts, and national and regional trends, now expanded to include boating and target shooting. Proposals under this priority are submitted by AFWA, USFWS, and a competitively selected vendor endorsed by State Directors. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supports the Survey by facilitating OMB clearance, addressing methodological and questionnaire issues, ensuring accessibility and publication, and coordinating collaboration among contractors, AFWA Technical Workgroups, and other stakeholders, complementing the MSCGP grant for data collection and survey administration.

B. AFWA Facilitated National Priorities

- **Management of the MSCGP Program**
- **Professional Development and Capacity Building for WRA and SFRA Programs Delivery**
- **National Conservation Coordination**
- **Management of the MSCGP Program**

The Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP) is coordinated and managed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to ensure effective, transparent, and accountable use of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funds. Program management includes setting strategic priorities, maintaining

policies and applicant guidance, facilitating proposal review and coordination among partners, and developing the annual Priority List of Proposals for federal approval. Through these activities, MSCGP management strengthens oversight, improves efficiency, and ensures that approximately \$11 million annually is invested in high-impact, multistate conservation and R3 projects aligned with national and regional priorities.

➤ **Professional Development and Capacity Building for WRA and SFRA Programs Delivery**

Professional development activities supported under this priority must be directly and demonstrably tied to improving state fish and wildlife agencies' ability to carry out eligible activities under the WRA and SFRA. Eligible training is limited to that which strengthens agency capacity to deliver conservation, management, and public-use programs for wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish, including associated Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3), hunter education, and aquatic education activities allowable under statute.

This priority does not support general or undefined professional training, agency operations unrelated to WRA or SFRA delivery, or workforce development activities that could be funded through other sources. While some AFWA professional development initiatives may incidentally support broader agency functions, only the portions that clearly advance WRA- and SFRA-authorized conservation or R3 outcomes are eligible for MSCGP funding.

The AFWA Management Assistance Team (MAT) serves as the primary mechanism for delivering professional development supported under this priority. MAT-supported training focuses specifically on helping states improve their effectiveness, efficiency, and coordination in carrying out WRA- and SFRA-funded programs. Professional development activities that fall outside this statutory purpose—regardless of potential agency benefit—are not eligible under MSCGP and must be supported by other funding sources.

C. National Conservation Coordination

Support AFWA-approved professional development, training, policy, legal, and implementation efforts that advance Association priorities, Presidential Task Force recommendations, and AFWA-approved plans, while building consistent capacity across state fish and wildlife agencies. This includes policy and legal training related to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, governance, trapping policy implementation, and other priority topics identified by AFWA.

Effective conservation on a national and international scale also requires strong coordination among state fish and wildlife agencies, federal partners, NGOs, industry, and international bodies. Many state agencies lack the resources to participate fully in multi-jurisdictional and international conservation efforts that affect trade, management authority, and funding for wild birds, wild mammals, and sport fish. Dedicated support is needed to ensure states have a meaningful and unified voice in these forums, strengthen collaboration with industry partners

that contribute to conservation through excise taxes, and modernize coordination and communication platforms. Together, these efforts will enhance collaboration, amplify state leadership, and strengthen long-term capacity to conserve and manage wildlife for the public benefit.